

Dear Senator Johnson,

My name is Heidi Fleming, and I am writing to share what happened to my father, John “Sparky” Fleming Jr., at Piedmont Fayetteville Hospital in Georgia in April 2023.

My father was 78 years old, a retired Atlanta police officer, former detective, and loving father known by everyone as “Sparky.” Despite suffering a stroke years earlier, he remained active, exercised regularly, and was making progress in home therapy after complications from a catheter-related infection.

On April 3, 2023, I took him to the hospital because he appeared confused and tired. We believed he had another infection from his catheter. Within days, he improved significantly. He was alert, eating meals, watching television, talking normally, and asking to come home.

Everything changed after a new doctor took over his care around April 10. My father began receiving numerous medications we did not fully understand, including opioids, heavy laxatives, blood pressure medications despite low blood pressure, insulin even though he was not diabetic, and other drugs that concerned us once we later reviewed the records.

A nurse pressured me to consent to a contrast dye scan. My father specifically said he did not want it and begged to go home. Shortly after receiving the contrast dye, his neck swelled and he suddenly struggled to breathe. He was placed on BiPAP oxygen and heavily medicated. From that point forward, he rapidly declined.

He was later labeled COVID-positive after already being hospitalized for many days for a bladder infection, despite not being admitted for COVID. Discussions about ventilators, remdesivir, and DNR orders followed shortly afterward. Staff repeatedly emphasized his age and weakness instead of discussing recovery options.

My father lost approximately 30 pounds in 15 days. He was given diuretics and laxatives while receiving little nutrition or hydration. He repeatedly asked for water, was denied and asked to go home. Even while extremely weak, he continued trying to exercise from his hospital bed because he wanted to live.

In his final hours, we were pressured toward comfort care and morphine. I watched my father struggle to breathe while being told there was no hope left. He died on April 17, 2023.

After obtaining his records, I found numerous discrepancies, medication concerns, and missing documentation related to the allergic reaction he suffered after the contrast dye. To this day, I believe my father’s decline was caused not simply by illness, but by the treatment he received while hospitalized.

Thank you for allowing families like mine the opportunity to place these stories into the public record and have an opportunity to testify.

Sincerely, Heidi Fleming