

Dear Senator Ron Johnson,

My name is Tammy Baker, and I am writing to share the story of my sister, Sandra “Sandy” Sterling, who died on January 3, 2022, at Regional One Medical Center in Memphis, Tennessee, after being hospitalized for COVID-19. Sandy was 50 years old, a loving mother, sister, and woman of strong faith. She left behind a nine-year-old daughter who was only allowed to see her mother one time during nearly three months of hospitalization.

Sandy was admitted to the hospital on October 9, 2021. After approximately six weeks, our family was told she was stable enough to be transferred to Regional One for rehabilitation. We believed she was improving. Instead, her condition rapidly declined.

Sandy was unvaccinated, and both she and our family believed she was treated differently because of that status. She requested treatments such as Ivermectin, Vitamin C, and Vitamin D, but those requests were refused. She told me directly that she felt ignored and neglected. She repeatedly complained that the forced oxygen pressure being used on her was hurting her lungs and making it difficult to breathe. I personally relayed these concerns to hospital staff multiple times.

During my visits, Sandy frequently begged for water and basic care. She was physically restrained with her hands tied down. She became increasingly weak and unable to communicate clearly after prolonged high-pressure oxygen support and later ventilation.

I also observed a lack of basic hygiene and oral care. Sandy’s tongue became severely swollen and dry, and she begged me to help clean her mouth, but I was restricted from doing so. She was often unable to speak because of the oxygen apparatus on her face. She repeatedly pointed to her monitor readings asking why they would not reduce oxygen pressure if her numbers were stable.

Our family was pressured regarding medical decisions, including discussions surrounding ventilation and DNR status. Eventually, we received an emergency call requesting consent for intubation. Shortly afterward, Sandy was placed on a ventilator. She never recovered.

During her hospitalization, Sandy was administered medications including fentanyl, morphine, lorazepam, propofol, heparin, blood thinners, anxiety medications, and blood pressure medications. She underwent multiple chest tube procedures during her stay.

As her sister, I believe Sandy suffered unnecessarily and was denied compassionate care, adequate advocacy, and meaningful involvement from her family during critical moments of her hospitalization. The isolation policies prevented us from protecting and comforting her. Watching her restrained, frightened, and begging for help is something I will carry for the rest of my life.

I respectfully ask that Sandy’s story be entered into the official record as part of your investigation into COVID-19 hospital protocols and patient treatment practices during the pandemic.

Sincerely,
Tammy Baker
Kentucky
Sister of Sandra “Sandy” Sterling