



**National
Multiple Sclerosis
Society**

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The Public Health Committee
March 14, 2007 Testimony in support of
S.B. No. 1226 (Raised) An Act Establishing A Fall Prevention Program

To: The Honorable Mary Ann Handley, Senate Co-Chair, Public Health Committee
The Honorable Peggy Sayers, House Co-Chair, Public Health Committee
The Honorable Gayle Slossberg, Senate Vice Chair, Public Health Committee
The Honorable Elizabeth Ritter, House Vice Chair, Public Health Committee
The Honorable Andrew Roraback, Senate Ranking Member, Public Health Committee
The Honorable Mary Ann Carson, House Ranking Member, Public Health Committee
and Distinguished Members of the Public Health Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. The National Multiple Sclerosis Society supports S.B. No. 1226 (Raised) An Act Establishing A Fall Prevention Program.

My name is Susan Raimondo and I am the Community Programs Director for the Greater Connecticut Chapter of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. I also serve on the Connecticut Long-Term Care Advisory Council as the Family Caregiver Representative. I have lived with multiple sclerosis in my family for over 30 years and worked at the MS Society for 20 years.

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a chronic, unpredictable disease of the central nervous system (the brain, optic nerves, and spinal cord). It is thought to be an autoimmune disorder. MS can cause blurred vision, loss of balance, poor coordination, slurred speech, tremors, numbness, extreme fatigue, problems with memory and concentration, paralysis, and blindness and more. These problems may be permanent or may come and go.

Most people are diagnosed between the ages of 20 and 50, although individuals as young as 2 and as old as 75 have developed it. Multiple sclerosis is not considered a fatal disease as the vast majority of people with it live a normal life-span. But people with MS struggle to live as productively as they desire, often facing increasing limitations, especially in their mobility.

The risk of experiencing falls in people with MS is high. A study published in the September 2006 issue of Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, Volume 87, Issue 9, Pages 1274-1279, stated that in a study of 1089 people with MS ages 45-90, exactly 52.9% of participants reported a fall in the past 6 months. Factors associated with an increased risk of a fall included being male, fear of falling, variable or deteriorating MS status in the past year, never or occasional use of a wheelchair, problems with balance or mobility, poor concentration or forgetfulness, and incontinence of bladder.

This study concludes that there are a number of factors associated with an increased risk of falling among people aging with MS that are amenable to intervention and therefore warrant the

attention of health care providers serving the population.

Falling can also play a role in people with MS also experiencing depression. A study of 1,032 veterans with MS were surveyed to determine what factors played a role in a major depressive episode. One of the factors that played a role in the presence of a major depressive episode was presence of falls in these veterans who had multiple sclerosis. This study was published in Neurology. 2005 Jan 11;64(1):75-80.

Many falls occur because people are having difficulty with ambulation which can occur as a result of chronic conditions like MS and/or aging. In my work at the National MS Society, we often hear from individuals with MS who have fallen and injured themselves. A fall impacts an individual's physical health but also can result in significantly higher health care costs. Medicaid and Medicare bear the brunt of these expenses.

The National MS Society recognizes the importance of a program like the Connecticut Collaboration for Fall Prevention. Some of the initial researchers for the CT Collaboration for Fall Prevention have also worked in the field of MS. At the MS Society, recently we have heard from people with MS who have participated in the CT Collaboration for Fall Prevention program, Step by Step. They report that their falls have been reduced. Interventions like the Connecticut Fall Prevention Program are successful in reducing falls and thus can reduce the economic and physical cost of falls.

The National Multiple Sclerosis Society supports SB 1226, An Act Establishing A Fall Prevention Program, including funding a statewide fall prevention program. Falls are an issue that requires public education and programming so that at-risk populations realize they why they are at risk and receive evidence-based advice on how to reduce those risks.

Currently the National MS Society is working on a number of advocacy issues related to long term care and home and community based services. We are partnering with groups like the Connecticut Commission on Aging, AARP, the Connecticut Association of Area Agencies on Aging, CT Association of Centers for Independent Living, Connecticut Community Care, Inc. and the Alzheimer's Association to work with the State of Connecticut including the Department of Social Services and Legislature to create improved options for services for people with disabilities and older adults.

Many of the needs that people with multiple sclerosis and other physical disabilities exhibit are similar to the needs of older adults. We ask that the legislation and the work that the Fall Prevention Program include adults of all ages who are at risk for falling.

Please pass SB1226, An Act Establishing a Fall Prevention Program.

Thank you.



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