

**Testimony of Michael Marinaccio
Before the
Committee of Human Services
Connecticut General Assembly
March 4, 2008**

Senator Harris, Representative Villano, and distinguished members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Michael Marinaccio and I live in Newtown.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Raised Bill #5793 - An Act Concerning Grants for Respite Care Services for Caretakers of Individuals with Alzheimer's disease.

My father, 87 years old, has Alzheimer's disease and has been living for 5 years at the Lutheran Home of Southbury which is a skilled nursing facility specializing in dementia care. He was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2001 but had been exhibiting cognitive decline for approximately 2 years prior to the diagnosis.

My wife and I became the primary caregivers although we lived an hour away. My mother resided in another skilled nursing facility close to us so she was not available to provide the necessary care for my father. We made the decision for him to continue living in his apartment as the dementia was still relatively mild and his main social gathering place with friends was close by. Despite the fact that we had jobs requiring significant travel, we would shuttle back and forth several times per week to make sure my father was taking his medications, eating properly and generally functioning as normal as possible. After one year, with my father's cognitive decline continuing, we decided to have him move in with us as he now needed regular companionship and help with custodial care activities 24/7. We hired a full-time live-in person from an agency utilizing what was left of my father's minimal assets. After another year, his dementia worsened significantly, assets were depleted and we transitioned him to the Lutheran Home.

Most caregivers of people with Alzheimer's are providing care themselves be it for a spouse, parent or a friend. Caring for someone 24 hours, 7 days a week is stressful, drains the family of financial resources and significantly impacts the caregiver's quality of life. Caregiver problems include depression, declines in physical health, strained social and family relations, neglect of self and others, work absenteeism and exhaustion. Having attended an Alzheimer's support group for 5 years, I have heard many stories from spouses and children struggling to care for people with Alzheimer's at home which highlight the need for accessibility to respite care. Increasing the maximum annual allocation from \$3500 to \$7500 per year is needed and will provide necessary breaks for people trying to deal with this difficult issue.

The cost of day care, home health aides and other services continues to rise, and the original amount of respite funding allocated to families has not increased in over 10 years. Additional funds were appropriated for this program last year, and this amendment will help families get the needed break they need when caring for someone with this disease. I urge you to support this legislation so our families can get a much needed break from the burdens of caregiving.

Thank you for your time and attention and I would be happy to answer any questions.