

TESTIMONY OF WINSTON HEIMER
Before the Appropriations Committee
Public Hearing on the Governor's Proposed Deficit Mitigation Plan
and the Impact of the Governor's Rescissions
Wednesday, December 09, 2009, 2: 00 PM, Room 2C, LOB

Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

My Name is Winston Heimer and I live in West Hartford. I chair the Public Policy Committee for the Connecticut Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association. I am also Corresponding Secretary for the Connecticut Alliance for Retired Americans which addresses Alzheimer's and other issues of concern to our elders. The Alliance supports the work of the Commission on Aging which addresses similar concerns.

I am here today in my capacity with the Alzheimer's Association to address my concern about the Alzheimer's Respite Care Program.

Caring for a loved one who has Alzheimer's disease is a labor of love but it can be stressful. Caregivers need a break. I should know. I took care of my wife alone for five years after she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's.

According to the Connecticut Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association, an estimated 70,000 Connecticut residents 65 and older will have Alzheimer's in 2010 with approximately 113,000 caregivers, primarily family members, providing 97 million hours of unpaid care. If they were to be paid for the care they give, it would total over \$1 billion.

Luckily, the state's Alzheimer's Respite Care Program for qualified caregivers offers some financial relief - as much as \$7,500 in some cases - that can be used to defray adult day program costs, the cost of a personal care assistant or other means allowing a caregiver some time off to recharge.

The program is administered by the state Department of Social Services and over nine hundred people took advantage of its resources in 2009. The average grant was approximately \$2,800.

The program was shut down last May and now nearly 265 people are waiting for it to reopen. They have been denied access to these services as a result of the Governor's directive. Governor Rell's proposed Deficit Mitigation Plan and current Rescissions would have the Connecticut legislature cut nearly \$1 million 115-thousand from the program's \$2.3 million budget.

The average cost of a Medicaid Rate nursing home stay is \$68,280 per year. ***The state of Connecticut can save \$65,450 per year for each person utilizing the Respite Care Program. The program conservatively saves the state at least \$50 million in avoided nursing home costs.***

I urge you to keep this vital program fully funded at \$2.3 million and not begin the steep rise in Connecticut State Budget Medicaid costs by cutting funding and denying access to the Alzheimer's Respite Care Program.

This program is part of the solution to finding savings and efficiency in the state budget and the services it delivers. Keeping intake to this program closed is short sighted and will drive up the state deficit adding at least another \$50 million dollars in costs to the State in each of the next two fiscal years alone.

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