Position Statement in support of An Act Concerning the Alzheimer's Respite Care Program, H.B. 5111

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The Alzheimer's Association is a donor supported, non-profit organization serving the needs of families, health care professionals, and those individuals who are affected with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. The Association provides information and resources, support groups, education and training, and a 24 hour, 7 Day a week Helpline.

Twelve years ago I and three other family caregivers sat around a table with other representatives of the Alzheimer's Association and discussed the tremendous stress upon family care givers and what we might do lessen the care giving burden. Each of us was personally familiar with those burdens and the toll that they had taken upon our own lives and our ability to care for our loved ones. We, like so many other family caregivers, had to struggle with the often conflicting demands of own needs and those of our family members. In my case, I did not take a vacation during the last five years of my father's life and made a series of career choices based solely upon the effect that they would have upon my caregiving responsibilities – decisions that ultimately had a significant negative impact upon my career and my future financial security.

Even the most dedicated caregiver eventually reaches a breaking point and for many Connecticut citizens, the Respite Grant Program is the only life line available to them. For the past five years, I have been spending one afternoon each week answering Helpline Calls at one of the Alzheimer's Association Offices. Not a single week has gone by when I have not received at least one call from a stressed-out family member who needed help in order to continue to care for his or her family member at home.

While I could discuss the importance of the Respite Program at length, I will leave that task to others who have received or been denied services. Instead, I would like to emphasize one point that is seldom addressed – the Respite Grant appropriation does more than provide services that allow families of individuals with dementia to continue to care for their loved ones at home; it also pays the wages of the Connecticut workers who provide the needed services. Thus, cutting funds will do more than cut needed services – it will potentially also eliminate Connecticut jobs. In past years, approximately 40% of the respite grant recipients used Respite Grant funds to pay for home health aides or

homemaker/companion services. Assuming an average cost of $18/hour, a $400,000 reduction in respite funding would cost Connecticut workers more than 22,222 hours of pay at a time when job creation, not elimination should be the goal.

We all recognize that this is a time when hard decisions must be made. The true economic impact of the decision, however, not simply the effect that the cut will have upon the current budget's bottom line, should be the determining factor. Cutting respite grant funding may save a dollar today but will potentially cost Connecticut millions of dollars tomorrow resulting from the multiple costs and lost revenues caused by the loss of Connecticut jobs and the increased long term care expenses that will incurred by families who need help in order to care for their loved ones at home. To avoid those consequences, I urge you to be "pound wise", NOT "penny foolish" and oppose the proposed $1,000,000 reduction in Alzheimer's Respite Grant Funding.