

WRITTEN TESTIMONY
of
Deborah R. Zale
To the Aging Committee
of the
Connecticut General Assembly

February 16, 2010

Chairpersons Sen. Prague and Rep. Serra and Honorable Members of the Aging Committee my name is Deborah Zale. Unfortunately, I am not able to attend and testify in person. I am writing to you today **in support** of the **Alzheimer's Respite Care Program. H.B. 5111. I ask you to re-open this essential program.**

My mother, Pearl, has been living through the psychological, physical, and emotional torments of Alzheimer's disease for at least the past ten years. Seven years ago, her states of confusion, memory loss, and inability to do simple administrative tasks forced her to retire from her beloved job as a researcher in Epidemiology/Public Health. At the same time, her acute anxiety associated with progressive dementia necessitated my moving into my mother's home full-time, so I could provide the administrative and day-to-day monitoring and support functions she required. This was in addition to her physical issues, taking care of doctor's visits to diagnose and treat several health issues that had deteriorated. She was in a state of constant pain from peripheral neuropathy and was not being treated for that nor for her worsening dementia.

My sister is a health professional who lives in central Maine and, therefore, was unable to be of much help. Our goal was to ensure that mom live comfortably at home and to continue enjoying her regular (although limited) social life for as long as she could remain happy and stimulated. For the first three years that I lived with and cared for my mother, I was the sole care provider; I drove her (or with her) everywhere, did the cooking, shopping, house-hold chores, maintenance, and bill payment. I did all this while having to "tip-toe" around because she was in Denial and absolutely refused any help. Also, she had an 88-year old friend who visited several times a week, and I shuttled him around, served him, and cleaned up after him. This was a difficult time for me. I was about to crack when I got hooked up with an AD Support Group and eventually applied for the Respite Care support.

The \$500 Grant that we were awarded from the Alzheimer's Respite Care Program enabled me to bring in an Aide who helped relieve the pressure on both of us. It allowed me to go to my part-time evening job and not have constant phone calls for 'emergencies'; to come home at 10:45 from work and not find mom outside, shivering in a nightgown, looking for the cat who had once again escaped; to come home and not find mom shaking and in tears because she couldn't figure out how to dial a friend. I had time to think, make phone calls, research and plan, and make decisions about mom's future without the constant onslaught of problems, fears, and crises.

In summary, this program has allowed me to cope with the emotional and physical stress of caring for a loved one. Respite care is one way to help delay nursing home care and is far less expensive than the alternative. The average cost of nursing home in Connecticut is \$120,000 a year. Respite care equates to both taxpayer savings and a better quality of life for the Alzheimer's patient. This economic comparison doesn't even touch on health of the caregiver. Being a caregiver is constant high stress. Health is certainly impacted (I've developed psoriasis and eczema), as is the caregiver's productivity, and ability to earn wages and pay taxes.

Thank you for listening to some reasons that I support the Alzheimer's Respite Care Program, and thank you for reading my testimony. If you would like to talk with me at a future date please feel free to contact me.

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