

Testimony

of

Judith C. Pfister, North Haven, CT

Before the Appropriations Committee

of the

Connecticut General Assembly

March 4, 2011

Chairpersons

Senator Toni Harp

Representative Toni Walker and

Honorable Members of the Appropriations Committee

My name is Judy Pfister. I am the caregiver of my spouse, an athlete in his youth, a basketball coach, a retired English teacher, and an avid sailor, who now has Alzheimers disease.

Four years ago, I resigned from my employment at a local hospital as a nurse when it was no longer safe for him to be left alone.

Even though we have been married for 42 years, the love of my life does not know who I am. He is robbed of his ability to communicate his thoughts and feelings. He does not know his childhood prayers.

When I resigned from my job, it sharply reduced our income. It also made having hired help impossible.

But I want to spend every minute we have left together. I feed him his chopped meals, give him his medications crushed in applesauce, shave, bathe, and dress him. I pray out loud so he hears the words. I transfer him to his wheel chair. He is physically weakened. Though he now weighs less than I do, it is exhausting to lift him.

I do this every day, all day, day and night.

I soon discovered that I am not able to do this alone, all the time. Even with love in my heart, it is hard work. I realize that I need to ask for help for myself in order to help him. The respite program keeps my husband at home and is also a benefit for me, the caregiver. It frees me for other family and social commitments, for rest from my daunting tasks. It gives me time to rejuvenate before I step out. I may then be replenished with patience and efficiency so that I do not resent the labor of it and I am able to continue.

A respite care program also decreases the impact this long term illness has on caregivers by giving them rest. I do not want caring for him to be a threat to my own health issues since I am his peer.

Recently because of all the snow storms, I had a respite care plan in place in the event we lost our electricity and had no heat. It was a great relief for me to have this plan.

I am thankful for the respite program that is available and hope it will continue to be funded. I am grateful for this opportunity to advocate today as a caregiver.