

Testimony of Catherine Sarni in support of the Alzheimer's Statewide Respite Program

Before the Appropriations Committee

March 4, 2011

Recent statistics tell us that someone will develop Alzheimer's every 70 seconds. For my Dad, Lawrence Sarni, we don't know exactly when that moment occurred.

What we do know is that he is a college educated, chemical engineer who founded a manufacturing company in Moosup, CT which is still in operation; served as a Director of Backus Hospital and The Norwich Savings Society in Norwich, CT; and was an avid golfer and stubbornly loyal Yankees and Giants fan. And he is my Dad. Even though he can't tell you that now.

What we also know is that he was diagnosed in 2005 with Alzheimer's Disease and has been fighting a courageous but soul crushing battle ever since. He lost his battle last month, as the disease progressed to the late stage: Wheelchair bound, unable to communicate, and recognized no one who should be familiar to him as far as we could tell except possibly my Mom. But it's her story that you need to hear.

My Mom cared for Dad for over four years at home. The easy part was learning how to run the household, take over the finances and manage his increasing medical needs. The hard part got harder as the disease progressed and she was eventually unable to leave him alone. As time went on, she faced grueling days and sleepless nights as she tried to calm his paranoia, make sure he took his meds and ate properly, made sure he didn't wander out the door, and dealt with his hygiene issues. She became more and more isolated as she was unable to leave him and friends visited less and less frequently. In addition to the physical strain, she also dealt with the emotional stress of never knowing what bizarre and seemingly unreasonable behavior she would have to deal with on any particular day.

By July of 2009 at the age of 87 facing physical exhaustion, she was convinced by her own physician to move Dad to an Alzheimer's facility and eventually to a nursing home where he lived for the past year. The financial burden of this is staggering but I don't believe she would have survived another year of that level of stress. She still visits and feeds him dinner daily but at least now she has "respite". With my sister living out of state and me having fulltime employment, my Mom chose to go it alone with my sister and I filling in when and where we could. But no one should have to. The health repercussions for caregivers under long term, chronic physical and mental stress are significant and certain.

I come to you today to ask that you continue funding for the Respite Care Program for the caregivers of this State. Without this program, many caregivers will never get the help they need just to get through each day. They are true heroes in this war and their battle is 24/7 even with help.

My Dad made his life and built his business in this State. He would be appalled if he ever knew what his disease has put his wife and family through. And if he could of, I know he would have stood before you today with the graciousness that is so much a part of who he was and ask you to keep the line-item funding for this essential program.