

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

March 4, 2011

Chairpersons Sen. Toni Harp and Rep. Toni Walker and Honorable Members of the Appropriations Committee my name is Deborah Zale. Unfortunately, I am not able to attend and testify in person because of my work schedule. I am writing to you today **in support of the Alzheimer's Respite Care Program. I ask you to retain the line item funding for 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 memory loss, confusion, and inability to do simple administrative tasks forced her to retire from her beloved job as a researcher/interviewer in Yale University's Department of Epidemiology/Public Health. At the same time, her acute anxiety associated with progressive dementia necessitated my moving into her home full-time, so I could provide the day-to-day monitoring and support functions she required. All this 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 or for her worsening dementia.

My sister is a Physicians Assistant 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 possible. For the first three years that I cared for my mother, I was the sole care provider; I drove her (or, much scarier, *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 fall apart when I got connected with an AD Support Group and learned about the Respite Care support.

The \$500 Grant that we were awarded from the **Alzheimer's Respite Care Program** enabled me to hire 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 from work at 10:45 pm and *not* find mom outside, in her nightgown, shivering, looking for the kitten who had - once again - escaped; to come home and *not* find mom shaking, in tears, crying "What's the matter with me? Am I going crazy??" 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 other stress-related conditions), as is the caregiver's productivity and ability to earn wages and pay taxes.

Thank you for listening to some reasons that I enthusiastically support the **Alzheimer's Respite Care Program**, and thank you for reading my testimony. If you would like more information, please feel free to contact me.

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