

Testimony of Melissa Griffin before the Appropriations Committee

February 17, 2012

Senator Toni Harp, Representative Toni Walker and members of the committee, my name is Melissa Griffin, and I am here to testify in support of the Connecticut Alzheimer's Statewide Respite program and ask that you not cut funding to this program.

It has been almost 8 years since we first noticed the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease begin to claim my grandmother's personality, her memory, and her life. Since then she has had numerous hospital visits and nursing home stays. We are fortunate that she currently lives at home with my grandfather while battling through the severe stages of this disease. But it is only with 12 hours a day of assisted care, 7 days a week, that this can happen.

I became an advocate for this disease because I have seen the burdens it carries, both emotional and financial. With Alzheimer's disease, it is not just those with the disease who suffer, it's also their caregivers and loved ones. Caring for an individual with Alzheimer's disease typically falls on family and friends and takes both a physical and emotional toll. Caregivers of Alzheimer's patients are twice as likely as caregivers of people without these conditions to provoke their own health problems and report symptoms of depression. They struggle with making the best decisions for their loved ones while trying to deal with the sadness this disease brings.

Now, all all of my grandparents' retirement savings is spent on care for my grandmother, Nona. My Nona was the head nurse at Windham Hospital for years. She spent her entire life caring for others in this community, but now she needs to be cared for each and every day.

My grandfather has had his own difficulties maintaining his health while battling through prostate cancer and a recent diagnosis of diabetes. Still, he has continued to keep my grandmother at home because it's what's best for her. However, I have seen him struggle with caring for himself because it's so important for him to make sure my grandmother is as comfortable as possible. It's a paradoxical effect: he works so hard to care for his wife, yet sometimes he forgets to care for himself. That's why it's so important that he receives assistance from Companions and Homemakers every day. The caregivers who help take care of my grandmother keep her safe. Because of them my grandmother can still live at home and be surrounded by the people who love her most, instead of transitioning to a costly nursing home.

My grandmother's disease has emotionally troubled me for years. She has been the most important woman in my life and she has not gotten the chance to see me grow into the woman she dreamed I'd be. I'm here today not just for my Nona, though. I'm here for the 70,000 Connecticut residents going through this same struggle.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak on behalf of the benefits of this program and for the reasons above, I ask you please do not cut funding.

Melissa Griffin

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