

**Public Health Committee**  
**February 20, 2013**

**Written Testimony H.B. 5979 An Act Establishing a Task Force on Alzheimer's Disease**

I would like to bring your attention to the impact of Alzheimer's disease on patients in the State of Connecticut and their caregivers. I am a licensed Clinical Psychologist in Guilford, Connecticut, and a large part of my geriatric practice involves working with patients suffering from Alzheimer's disease. In Connecticut alone, there are an estimated 70,000 individuals 65 and older living with the disease, and Connecticut presently does not have a State Plan, as most of the other states do, to coordinate the services provided to these patients.

With the aging of the baby boom generation, the number of Americans aged 65 and over with Alzheimer's is expected to skyrocket. Today, 5.4 million Americans aged 65 and over are living with the disease. By mid-century, that number is expected to reach 13.5 million-and could be as high as 16 million. It is also the sixth leading cause of death and the only cause of death among the top 10 without a way to prevent, cure or even slow its progression.

Individuals with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias are high users of health care, long-term care and hospice services. Average annual Medicare payments for individuals with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias are three times higher than for those without the conditions. More alarming to Connecticut: Medicaid payments for those with the disease are, on average, nineteen times higher.

As I serve these extremely ill patients, I move from hospitals, to nursing homes, to rehabilitation facilities, to private care facilities, and to private homes. Since these patients suffer from dementia, they are unable to express their needs, or to supervise their own care. This burden often falls upon their families or friends, and if there is no one to help them, the patients are simply placed in some facility that is willing to house them, and there they are often over-medicated to keep them quiet. Since there is no over reaching State Plan, none of this is supervised in an organized way. Families are bewildered and overburdened trying to understand what action to take, or where to turn for help.

There is no question that Connecticut needs a State Plan similar to that which other states have. It would provide an organized and responsible approach to long term care, home and community based services, better training for health care givers, improving the quality of care, improving case management, early detection and diagnosis, and adequate research funding to fight this insidious illness. We need support for vital programs, such as the statewide Alzheimer's Respite Program, Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders, and Adult Day Care, which allow individuals to remain in their homes and in many cases delay costly institutionalization. This disease is rapidly increasing. Connecticut must take responsible action in the face of this extremely high level of suffering. We must not abandon our elderly patients.

Thank you for your attention and allowing me to submit this testimony in support of H.B. 5979

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