

**Committee on Aging
Public Hearing
Tuesday, February 25, 2014
Testimony of Sandra Pniewski**

Senator Ayala, Representative Serra, Commissioner Prague and distinguished members of the Committee on Aging, I thank you for allowing me to submit testimony in support of ***An Act Concerning the Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia Task Force's Recommendations on Training, Raised Bill No. 179.***

I speak to you today in support of Workforce Training. I have had the honor of serving on the Task Force on Alzheimer's disease and Dementia. I served on both the Workforce Training and Development and Quality Care subcommittees. I am also the Director of Therapeutic Recreation of Maefair Health Care Center located in Trumbull Connecticut as well as serving as a Regional Liaison within the Athena Health Care System.

I was appointed by Governor Malloy as a representative of a long-term care facility, and was among several providers from long-term care facilities and community-based healthcare services that were fortunate enough to get the opportunity to serve on the task force.

There was unanimous consensus amongst the sub-committee and Task Force members after much study, discussion and debate that the nature of the disease requires a heightened level of skill and training. The cognitive, behavioral and psychiatric disorders and eventual decline in functional, emotional and cognitive status require complex care.

The workforce training subcommittee found that individuals with Alzheimer's or other related dementias are residing and being served daily throughout the health care system and community, yet many health care professionals and ancillary workers are not appropriately trained in the medical and behavior issues that face individuals with Alzheimer's and related Dementia's experience daily, despite frequent contact with individuals with this disease. Having served on both Workforce Training and Quality Care subcommittees, I am able to speak about the positive outcomes and correlation between dementia training and the quality of care delivered. With the projected growth in the cases of Alzheimer's and other related dementias, it is imperative that we prepare the workforce and ancillary entities that provide this care.

Having been employed in skilled nursing facilities since the age of 16 and being employed for Athena Health Care Systems for 20 years, I recommend and support efforts to expand dementia training in chronic and convalescent nursing homes. I have experienced in my tenure in health care how the lack of training in this area can create negative outcomes when staff are not fully prepared and trained to respond to the complexity of care these individuals require, negative

outcomes may occur. It has been my experience that in many areas including regulatory code the area of training is not specified and is limited in nature. If in fact training is provided, it is often not conducted by an expert in this area and followed by competency and comprehension of the materials. These issues have supported the Task Force recommendation of the establishment of a "Dementia Care Committee" to ensure that all facility staff who provide care and are involved in the residents daily environment are receiving training and competency's upon hire and annually thereafter in Alzheimer's disease and dementia symptoms and care.

This small investment in training will reveal great returns in patient care and safety as well as overall quality of life for the individuals we live with and serve daily. Facilities that provide care to the growing number of individuals with the disease must keep up with the needs of its clients. Minimum training in dementia care for all staff in skilled facilities, residential care homes, assisted living facilities, adult congregate living facilities, adult day care centers, hospice, home health agencies and homemaker/companion agencies upon hire and annually thereafter is not burdensome and is minimal when considering patient safety and quality of care.

Thank you for raising and advancing the workforce training recommendations of the Task Force. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sandra Pniewski