

Aging Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-6173

AN ACT EXPANDING ELIGIBILITY FOR THE ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Title: RESPITE CARE PROGRAM.

Vote Date: 2/26/2019

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 2/14/2019

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Aging Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

The bill expands the eligibility for the Alzheimer's disease respite care program from annual income of more than \$41,000 to \$51,000 or liquid assets of more the \$109,000 to \$120,000 to be effective on July 1, 2019. The bill also directs the Commissioner of Rehabilitation Services to establish regulations that will include standards for eligibility for respite care services.

Substitute language (LCO 4640) increases the income limits to \$50,000 and \$125,000 respectively. Both income and asset levels are raised by about \$4,000 for consistency from current levels in the JFS language.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Ms. Amy Porter, Commissioner, Dept. of Rehabilitation Services: The testimony they submitted is in opposition to this bill. The respite care program is operated as a needs-based, non-entitlement program and services are provided with available appropriations. The income and asset eligibility caps grow each year. Currently a recipient must have an income no greater than \$45,620 and assets no greater than \$121,283 and effective July1, 2019 their income and assets must not be greater than \$46,897 and \$124,679, respectively. Their concern is that this type of expansion will decrease the amounts of funds available to lower income clients.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Senator Tony Hwang, 28th Senate District: The Senator submitted testimony in support of this proposal. According to the Alzheimer's Association in 2011, 15.2 million family members and friends provided 17.4 billion hours of unpaid care to their loved one, care valued at \$210.5 billion. More than 60% of these caregivers report very high levels of stress and a third of caregivers suffer from depression. Respite care gives these caregivers time off to decompress and recover and prepare to continue providing for their loved ones. Caring for our loved ones can be difficult and we should incentivize and reward those caregivers and he believes this bill would help in doing that.

Ms. Mag Morelli, President, LeadingAge Connecticut: She submitted testimony in support of this legislation. Unpaid caregivers provide countless hours of unpaid long-term care and they are the true heroes of our long-term services and supports system and providing them with needed respite is the prudent thing to do as they save our Medicaid program millions of dollars every year. They do caution that funding for the program is capped and if the eligibility is expanded without an increase in funding, current recipients will receive less funding and therefore fewer services.

Ms. Kimberly Clawson, MSHA, Associate Director Business Development, Nursing Care Center Services, The Joint Commission: They submitted testimony in support of this bill especially for accreditation in nursing which offer respite care. They indicate that The Joint Commission evaluates and accredits more than 21,000 health care organizations and programs in the United States. It is an independent, not-for-profit organization and it is the nation's oldest and largest standards-setting and accrediting body in health care. Their accreditation is considered a "seal of approval" that tells regulators, consumers and others that a program is committed to provide access to quality services.

AARP Connecticut: They submitted testimony in support of this bill as long as there is sufficient funding available to maintain the current level of services. They point out that the Respite Care Program provides much needed relief to the family caregivers who take care of their loved ones at home.

Mr. Rich Bright, Volunteer, AARP Connecticut: He offered testimony in support of this proposal. It is estimated that family caregivers in Connecticut provide \$5.9 billion annually in unpaid care for an aging parent or loved one. These family caregivers provide services that help keep loved ones at home and saves Connecticut taxpayers millions of dollars in nursing home costs. AARP asks the legislature to provide the funding needed to protect current beneficiaries and expand services to newly eligible families.

Ms. Mona Friedland, Volunteer, AARP Connecticut: her testimony indicated support for this bill. The Respite Care Program is needed now more than ever because the number of persons living with Alzheimer's disease is growing and there is an increased number of people developing younger onset. There are also a growing number of referrals from the Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders due to enrollment caps and increased co-pay requirements.

Mr. Mike Sopchak, Volunteer, AARP Connecticut: His testimony was in support of this proposal. He mentioned that family caregivers face huge responsibilities, and caregiving in

today's economic climate can take a significant toll. Mr. Sopchak shared his families experience with his mother during her final years.

Ms. Marie Allen, Executive Director, Connecticut Area Agencies on Aging (C4A); She offered testimony in support of this bill but indicates that increasing eligibility without an increase in funds available to the Program will result in reduced care plans and potential safety issues for vulnerable elders.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Ms. Peaches Quinn, M.P.H., President, Connecticut Coalition on Aging: She offered testimony in opposition to this legislation. The intent of this program is to assist families in crises that have no other resources, not for families looking to protect their assets. She points out that there is language in the statute that raises the income and asset levels annually based upon the yearly COLA and they do not support increasing eligibility that will make more people with higher incomes eligible which serves to reduce funds to the neediest users of the program.

**Reported by: Gaia McDermott, Clerk
Richard Ferrari, Assistant Clerk**

3/5/19