

March 5, 2024

To: Alaska Legislature
Fm: Michelle Cassano, Alzheimer's advocate
Re: SB 235

Thank you for taking my testimony on this pivotal issue, upon my husband's passing recently, we concluded a 13 year battle with Alzheimer's and related dementias.

In the last 4 years of his life our family had to rely on memory care, assisted living and finally hospice to keep my husband safe and in the best health possible. There are so many medical, social and economic issues surrounding Alzheimer's I would like to focus on the caregivers who care for these fragile individuals.

As a nurse I never thought I would not be able to care for my husband, but when his safety was at risk due to wandering and agitation, we made a difficult decision.

The facility during COVID had difficulty maintaining staff, many young individuals with little experience with seniors and/or Alzheimer's. Subsequently he was frequently transported to Emergency Services, each visit averaged \$14,000 at least once a month, when a warm drink and being put back to bed would have sufficed. This is a burden to emergency rooms, poor use of resources and terribly upsetting to patient and family.

CNAs trained in dementia care can effectively manage challenging behaviors and ensure the safety and security of our loved ones. This gives us peace of mind, knowing that our family member is in capable hands, even in difficult situations.

CNAs trained in dementia care can recognize early signs and symptoms of cognitive decline. This enables timely interventions and support services, potentially slowing the progression of dementia.

When our resources mandated, we move my husband to a Medicaid waiver facility, we found a staff who were so well trained and connected with my loved one and anticipated quirks, like lying on the floor when tired...avoiding falls...getting him comfortable and helping with processes that would allow rest, two years not one hospital visit.

I cannot explain how reassuring it is to know your loved one has proper care, backed by education, CNAs are an important part of the healthcare team, they attend continuing education, adding dementia training is critical as our population ages, and more are diagnosed with early onset dementias. Classes and training is offered by agencies such as the Alzheimer's Association and often are at little to no cost, should not be a burden in terms of a fiscal note.

Again, my appreciation of your attention to this matter.

Michelle Cassano
mcassano@gci.net
907-351-5468

