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Testimony of Evie Vander Meer in Support of HB141
Maryland
Jan 19, 2021

My name is Evie Vander Meer and I am here in support of HB141

My husband, Mark, was diagnosed at age 61 with young onset Alzheimer's disease. During his next 4 years of life we both used our voices to share our story. I'm grateful to be here today.

In the first couple of years, I believed I would be able to care for Mark until he died. I could not have imagined the physical and emotional toll it would take on me. Every daily task required problem solving. How do I get him to eat, sit in the car, find the toilet, stay calm during conversations at the family table. What do I do when he bolts out the front door and starts running down the street or insists on walking the dog by himself. It's draining to argue, say no, ride through the neighborhood looking for him or to call the police.

Eventually my friends and family begin insisting I bring in a Residential Service Agency (RSA). They recognized that I was barely getting through a day. I finally acquiesced, knowing there was still a long journey before me.

I panicked when I discovered that a hired carer does not have training in dementia. I knew that there was no hope for me to get relief and recovery time if someone came in thinking they could bring a book, with TV with Mark and prepare a lunch. I wouldn't need a break if it was that simple.

I was determined to find a way to regain my coping skills. My solution was to stay home with the carers for the first few 3 visits. I asked them to observe how I interacted with Mark, how he reacted, how to respond with a calm voice, and how to understand "Alzheimer's Speak". In other words, I paid for the training of 3 women and gave up those hours of recovery and refreshment for myself. I did it because it was the only way I could think of to prevent myself from crashing.

People who care for their loved ones with dementia are living with high levels of trauma every day. A great majority are sleep deprived, bombarded with confusing, repetitive conversations, irritating sounds, crying, battles over eating and hygiene and aggressive behaviors. Now imagine living with this level of trauma for years. It is not sustainable.

Training in dementia care for hired caregivers can no longer be optional. Please support this bill which requires training in dementia care within the residential service agencies.

Thank you.