



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

KATHY BERNIER

January 25, 2016

Assembly Committee on Mental Health Reform

Testimony on Assembly Bill 787 – funding for respite care under the Alzheimer’s Family Caregiver Support Program

Good morning Chairman Tittl and committee members. Thank you for scheduling Assembly Bill 787 for this public hearing and allowing me time to present testimony in favor of the bill.

The proposal before you today is one piece of a package that stems from our work on the Speaker’s Task Force on Alzheimer’s and Dementia. The task force held multiple public hearings throughout the state and received input from numerous citizens concerning Alzheimer’s and dementia patients, as well as the impact on families and caregivers. These diseases affect thousands of Wisconsinites every day. I am proud that the work we’ve done on the task force has resulted in positive bi-partisan legislation that will make a difference in the lives those who suffer the effects of these debilitating illnesses.

The bill I am bringing forward deals with funding for respite care under The Alzheimer’s Family and Caregiver Support Program (AFCSP). The AFCSP was created as part of the 1985-87 biennial budget and was designed to fund various services for caregivers and the families of individuals with Alzheimer’s or other dementias. To be eligible for this program an individual, or individual’s family member, must be diagnosed with Alzheimer’s or other dementia, have an annual income of no more than \$40,000, and reside in a community or home setting.

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In 2015, the Department of Health Services allocated just over \$1.5 million to AFCSP. Assembly Bill 787 increases the 2016-17 appropriation by \$1 million and is directed specifically toward respite care. Respite care provides temporary care to those living with Alzheimer's or other dementias, so their usual caregivers can be provided some much-needed relief.

Thousands of Wisconsinites care for those living with Alzheimer's or other dementias every day. Many of these caregivers are elderly spouses or children of those living with these diseases and they can often become overwhelmed with caring for their loved one. Being a caregiver can increase stress, putting them at a higher risk of heart attack and stroke. AFCSP provides a much needed resource to caregivers and respite care can provide them with time to relax and relieve stress. In Assembly Bill 787 we recognize the importance of thoughtful care throughout the life of the patient and we acknowledge the significance that end-of life care has on those surviving family members and loved ones.

Mr. Chairman and committee members, Assembly Bill 787 is a straight forward bill that provides long-overdue recognition and funding directly to support the growing number of patients and caregivers who suffer from these debilitating conditions.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to share my experience on the Speaker's Task Force and the stories shared by those impacted by Alzheimer's and other dementias. The Department of Health Services will be testifying after me, but if you have any questions I would be happy to answer them.