

Testimony
House Bill 1012 – Denise Fettig-Loftesnes, Bismarck, North Dakota
Senate Appropriations Committee
Senator Ray Holmberg, Chairman
March 11, 2021



Mister Chair and members of the committee, my name is Denise Fettig-Loftesnes and I am from Bismarck, North Dakota. Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I am a caregiver for my parents, who were both recently diagnosed with Alzheimer's. I have a sister who also lives in Bismarck and serves as a caregiver, and we have seven other siblings living around the country who do everything they can to help. Here is a picture of my mom and dad, Agnes and Matt, and all of their children and grandchildren.

Three months ago, we learned that our father has dementia, and soon after that we received a similar diagnosis for our mother. We were devastated. With all of our life experience, me and my eight siblings knew almost nothing about Alzheimer's. Our parents live together independently in a wonderful community here in Bismarck, Marillac Manor, and we were desperate to ensure that they could stay there and live safely for as long as possible with their many friends. But what could we do? How do we help our parents? Who do we turn to?

Beginning with helpful guidance from staff at Marillac, and continuing through a number of phone calls, we were directed to Nikki Wegner at the Western North Dakota Alzheimer's Association. That is when our lives, and the lives of our parents, changed forever—and for the better. Nikki immediately put us in touch with health care providers, including an occupational therapist, Megan Dooley of Bismarck, who transformed our parents' apartment into a safe and comfortable home. Nikki also connected us with local experts who recommended and provided important products—such as door alarms and identification bracelets—to enhance our parents' safety.

Most importantly, though, Nikki became a guiding light for our family, holding multiple zoom meetings to answer questions, providing detailed emails, and just generally providing

invaluable counsel. From our first meeting with Nikki we knew that there was hope for our parents. She not only provided the information that we needed to address our parents' needs, but she delivered it in a helpful and caring way that put all of us at ease.

Time and time again my siblings—who live in states from coast to coast—have marveled at the assistance that North Dakota's Dementia Care Services Program provides its elderly citizens. We feel so lucky and so blessed that our parents are growing old in this great state. And we are not alone. My parents' generation—that Great Generation to whom we all owe so much—is getting older, and there are families from Williston to Wahpeton, and from Bowman to Bathgate, that need your help.

My parents are proud, but they want you to know their story. They were both raised on North Dakota farms and educated in rural schoolhouses and worked hard—together—to raise a family and to give their children a chance to live an even better life than they had. They never asked for anything, from anyone. But they need your help now. After giving so much, they—and so many other elderly North Dakotans—need the crucial support that the DCSP provides.

And that is why I am here today—to ask you to please support the services provided by the North Dakota Alzheimer's Association and to increase funding for the Dementia Care Services Program to \$1,332,000. Alzheimer's is a cruel fate, and families are desperate for help. Your support of this bill is a small return for all that my parents, and your parents, and all of our elderly friends and neighbors, have done for North Dakota. Please vote Yes.

Thank you. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Denise Fettig-Loftesnes