

SUBJECT: Testimony in Support of an Increase to Personal Needs Allowance

TO: North Dakota Legislators

I do not prepare this testimony on behalf of my brother, but instead, because of my brother.

My brother, Kelly, is extremely thankful for the great care he receives as a resident of SMP Health - Maryhill in Enderlin and is equally thankful for government programs that enable him to reside there. Kelly moved into that facility in 2020 at the young age of 61. He has had severe physical disabilities since he was in his early 20s. He has lived most of his life tolerating extreme pain, working as long as he possibly could, and living independently until it was not possible for him to provide for his basic needs. Only in recent times has he agreed to even seek external help from government programs. Kelly has the attitude of "it is what it is" and thus I say he is not the one asking for an increase in his personal needs allowance because he's made do with whatever life has thrown at him for a long time.

Fortunately for him, he entered long term care during a period of time where the federal government provided substantial COVID stimulus checks, and he has used that money to provide himself some very basic services such as a cell phone and television. And while those monthly costs have continued to rise, his "monthly income" has remained stagnant at \$65. Two years ago, when he heard that Social Security was getting a cost-of-living increase, he was disappointed to find out that his portion would remain the same. However, he did not complain but instead his "it is what it is" attitude, and the remaining balance of COVID stimulus money, enabled him to sustain basic quality of life services. However, in the coming months he will be forced to make some very tough decisions.

Kelly's physical condition keeps him in his room 99% of the time, only leaving twice a week for bathing. Being limited to this small space, one can only imagine the necessity to have a television to watch and a cell phone to call family and use to listen to music. These are things most of us take for granted but to him they are his whole world. He doesn't miss a Twins baseball game. He follows the Bison football team religiously. Any weekend with North Dakota high school sports state championships on TV gives him an enormous boost. And with no immediate family of his own, his cell phone enables afternoon phone calls at 3:30 with his 84-year-old mother ... an essential daily event for each of them.

Even beyond these basic items that are at risk, it is really the more human things that cause me the greatest concern. Each Christmas he has always enjoyed giving the "Fab 7" (what he calls his seven grand nieces and nephews) very simple gifts. With this year's purchase he said that he'd probably need to stop doing that in the future. Every September 5th since 2013, he has insisted he pay for and has Mom place 4 red roses and one white rose at our Dad's gravesite in honor of his death, representing Mom and their four kids. The candy dish he keeps in his room comes with a generous offer to any member of the caregiving team that enters his room. These are merely examples of why Kelly is a favorite person in many people's minds. However, these simple things that sustain his dignity as a vital member of the family, and a cordial resident at Maryhill, are at risk of ending because quite frankly, \$65 doesn't go very far nowadays.

After merely commenting about this situation during one of Kelly's quarterly Care Conferences, I was so excited to hear back from the facility director who in turn connected me with the North Dakota Long Term Care Association. Knowing that others had already begun to

focus on this was so heartwarming. And then learning that the Governor included it in the budget request has given me so much optimism that this could become a reality. I fully understand the complexity of developing a state's budget as I have 34 years of experience working in government, but I hope this testimony helps portray the impact a simple increase of \$35 per month can make on a genuinely good individual, and my guess is Kelly is not alone in this scenario.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kory Auch