

Good morning, Chairman Ruby and members of the committee:

My name is Dawn Anderson and I am here to testify in support of House Bill 1433.

My mom was diagnosed with dementia about 12 years ago, she passed away 4 years ago. My brother and I, along with my mom's husband, had noticed changes in her memory; increased irritability, and a general change in her demeanor. We encouraged her to see a neurologist, who prescribed cognitive testing. She was absolutely not in favor of seeing anyone about these issues because, even though she was very aware of the changes that were happening to her, she did not want to hear a diagnosis of dementia. Her father, my grandfather, also had dementia and had lived in long term care for several years prior to his passing in 2002.

The testing showed a definite decline in memory and trouble with a variety of activities of daily living, such as not being able to follow her recipe for donuts that she'd made for the people of Rugby for many years. She could no longer effectively and accurately complete alterations for people who had counted on her for many years to fix their clothing to fit.

I remember one particular conversation with my mom while we sat at her kitchen table. She told me that she didn't want this to happen to her, too (in reference to her dad). It's so very difficult to know how to respond to one's own mom when she's crying and looking for answers where there are none.

There was such a stigma around the diagnosis of dementia from the time her dad was in long term care in the late 1990's and early 2000's that she did not want anyone around her talking about the possibility of her also having dementia. Unfortunately, that stigma still exists.

I often wonder if there were things that we, as her family, could have done differently to keep her brain more active; would that have made a difference? There was no one available to talk to about the disease to know what exactly to expect for her future. There were the well-intentioned but misinformed people asking questions about the disease with some acting as though it may be contagious.

As I get closer to the age that my mom was when she was diagnosed, I wonder if I too will have a conversation with my sons that I don't want to be aware of what's happening to me too. I pray that I never need to have that conversation...with anyone.

For North Dakota to take this important giant, proactive step forward to fund a Dementia Response program would be amazing. The right person in this position will ensure that residents of our state know there is no shame in being diagnosed with a disease and that their brain health is a priority.

Please vote to pass House Bill 1433 and show North Dakota that a proactive approach to Alzheimer's and dementia is a priority. Thank you for your time.