

Hi, good morning.

My name is Kirk Rankin.

Thank you so much to the committee for allowing me the opportunity to testify on behalf of S.206. I am currently a senior at the University of Vermont.

I have lived in Vermont for roughly five years, but I am from Washington, D.C. where I spent the entirety of my childhood around my extended family, including grandparents on both sides.

I had the pleasure of having very involved grandparents in my life which was an ultimate joy. Having them near was an amazing opportunity to learn about life's biggest hurdles, and absorb their loving presence.

After seeing my grandmother's diagnosis with dementia, and ultimately Alzheimer's with the passing of my grandfather, things certainly changed. This was my first real exposure to a close family member who experienced the incalculable hardships of dementia. About a year later I also began to witness my aunt's mom endure the struggles of dementia.

Though as a family we were fortunate to live nearby and support my grandmother the best we could, the underlying anxiety regarding this diagnosis and further cognitive deterioration was difficult. It scared us. And I know for a fact that so many other families share this similar anxiety given that around six million other Americans struggle with Alzheimer's.

Having experienced this as a grandson, I was left with an impression of sadness but also commitment. A dedication to involving myself in the greater effort towards a cure for this disease. Luckily, in part, that is what has brought me here today. I currently am the Advocacy Intern for the Vermont Chapter but pursued this internship opportunity because I wanted to learn more and offer my support and allyship here in Vermont - both inside and outside of this role.

It has been empowering to learn the ins and out's of the legislative process, participate in event planning, familiarize myself with advocacy efforts, and most importantly, connect with other students who share the same drive.

Through these new connections, I have been lucky to meet other folks in the community which has exposed me to advocates from around the state. For example, I was invited to join the planning committee for the Champlain Valley Walk. Thus, I have had the chance to first-hand hear both the motivation and struggles that these specific folks bring to the discussion around their experiences with Alzheimer's.

Just this past week, I was also lucky enough to co-host a student-led roundtable discussion about acknowledging advocacy efforts for students at both Middlebury and UVM. This included students

who were interested in the larger discussion around both Alzheimer's prevention *and* recognition. Caroline, a student from Middlebury who had also testified before was particularly inclined to coalesce and provide this meeting which was not only for the memory of loved ones but for the inclusion of others. I heard Caroline mention how the hardest thing she has had to do in her life was to remind her grandmother who she was each day. This was a similar dynamic I remember my mother also experiencing when she would visit my grandmother - before she was unable to talk.

Another one of our co-hosts Lindsey also led a discussion at Castleton College, as part of Castleton's Soundings program where they introduced recognition and identification strategies for 103 students who had a connection or felt compelled to participate. When asked how many students had family connections, roughly half of the room raised their hands.

These efforts that I, Lindsey, and Caroline have exhibited are a step in the right direction. Fortunately, these discussions provide a more collective appreciation and experience for family members, but they can only go so far. With better services, we will have the ability to extend outreach with even more tangible opportunities, and continue to implement a committed focus for students like us.

This is the reality for so many Vermonters, but also so many Washingtonians, like myself. I would like to add, that in May, Meg, Pamela who you will hear from later, and I will be traveling to D.C. to join Alzheimer's advocates from around the country in calling for federal funding and legislation to address this disease.

We are lucky to say that Vermont benefited from this with the BOLD grant which is supporting building capacity right now. But the fight in D.C., Vermont, and essentially every other state continues. As an advocate and a concerned college student, I have shared my voice in prompting our Congressional leaders to support these appropriations in addition to passing the ENACT Act. Prioritizing more inclusive and racially diverse clinical trials is an essential aspect of the move towards an equitable cure. These are examples of the coordinated effort that we must see both federally, and from the state and local levels.

S.206 will only enhance this greater recognition of much-needed services for Vermonters. This type of legislation would echo the sentiment we are seeing from constituents all over the country. We need to provide this boost. Please help support students like myself so we can create a sustained effort and a more integrated and comprehensive approach to the work that we are lucky to be a part of. Thank you.