

Below is my written testimony for the FY25 Budget:

My name is Abby Palaza and I am from Colchester Vermont. I am asking you on behalf of my family to allocate \$500,000 for the Dementia Respite Grant.

Five years ago, my father was diagnosed with younger-onset Alzheimer's Disease at the age of 50. Sometimes it feels like yesterday when my twin sister and I came home from our first semester of college one night to receive the news. But yesterday my dad could tie his shoes and today he cannot. A disease with progressive decline as its hallmark has certainly had the time to change the daily life my father leads. But it's not just my dad who has changed since then.

My mother transitioned from a full-time teacher's assistant to a full-time caregiver at home. My twin sister moved across the country to join the army for my dad who served 22 years active duty. And I live at home after graduating college last spring to provide the required respite my mother needs and the loving support my father deserves.

Now, five years after the diagnosis, my father cannot be left alone in the house. My mother and I are two of more than 20,000 unpaid dementia family caregivers in Vermont. When my mother needs to attend a doctor's appointment for her health or a hair appointment to feel like herself, I find the time to stay home with my dad. If I am not available due to working full-time, my mother has no time alone. She can rarely go grocery shopping by herself, a task that takes triple the time and stress to complete with my father. She has not had time to catch up with an old friend, just the two of them, in years. I provide roughly 3 hours of respite a week, but my mother deserves more to manage the emotional and physical toll of caregiving for her husband every day. But as two retirees with substantial costs to prepare for in the future for late-stage dementia care, paying over \$25/hour for respite services now is frightening. The lifetime cost of dementia is estimated to be more than \$390,000, with families shouldering 70% of these costs. These statistics scare us.

Five years from now, I have dreams of my own to go to graduate school where I can no longer stay in Vermont to care for my parents. But five years from now, I also know my father will require more services as his independence continues to deteriorate in addition to the respite services my mother must pay for in my absence. I am terrified of making this transition, but to see an increase in the Dementia Respite Grant, which has not seen an increase since 2003, would give me strength.

The Dementia Respite Grant could provide my mother with the required time to maintain her health and emotional well-being. It could give my father the care he deserves from my mother and those with the training to do so. For these reasons, I kindly ask this Committee to support the allocation of \$500,000 for the Dementia Respite Grant to help families like mine who is just one of many.

Thank you,
Abby Palaza