

Good afternoon! My name is Betsey Bianchi and I live in Killington. I'm here today with my amazing Mom and we greatly appreciate this opportunity to advocate for keeping the State Dementia Coordinator in the fiscal year 2024 budget!

My Mom was diagnosed with Alzheimer's eight years ago and has been living in Rutland at an independent living facility for the past six years. During her first four years in Rutland she thrived, but, as the disease has progressed, she has needed more and more assistance. Since she is still very social, none of the memory care facilities within an hour and half from our home are appropriate at this stage of her disease because very few, if any, of their current residents are verbal anymore. Unfortunately, our local assisted living facilities are not willing to admit her either because we are unable to guarantee she would remember to push her call button. Therefore, to meet her needs, she now has either a dedicated one-on-one caregiver from At Home Senior Care or myself with her whenever she is awake and caregivers periodically checking in all night long. Because of the shortage of caregivers, I was forced to give up my engineering career much sooner than planned to allow me to cover (as an unpaid caregiver) the many open shifts that arise each week.

Although there are some excellent resources available in Vermont, finding them is extremely challenging. Both unpaid caregiving and searching for resources is exhausting, overwhelming, debilitating and robs our family of the precious time to just be with my Mom as a family while she still knows who we are.

A State Dementia Coordinator will serve as a point person and help create a clear system for physicians in their diagnosis and care, and for families as they navigate the changing requirements of this disease. Funding a State Dementia Coordinator not only helps Vermonters better utilize our current resources but is a beautiful way to unite our state behind addressing a devastating disease that significantly impacts every community throughout our state. Thank you!