

My name is Jon Bouton and I live in Hartford with my wife Judi who has Alzheimer's. I am here to ask you to support the State Dementia Coordinator position that is included in the FY24 House Budget.

We are both 72. We each worked in service to our communities; Judi as an elementary school educator where she taught, brought arts programming into schools and helped students learn how to read. I was a County Forester: a public forestry advisor and educator.

Now that we have retired, with pensions, social security and savings, we could be volunteering in our communities of interest and enriching our grandchildren's life experiences. Instead this disease keeps us close to our familiar and comfy home. I no longer leave the house without her unless she's with a friend.

We are among the lucky ones. Our health insurance pays for annual checkups which led to a referral to the Neurology Department at Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center (just a 20 minute drive from home) which led to a diagnosis of early onset dementia, probably Alzheimer's. The Dartmouth Aging Resource Center has a no-cost dementia support program that is a big help to me as a caregiver and Judi who more and more needs me to look after her. Dementia is AWFUL. I don't think we would have survived this past year without the resources we have found and the knowledge that wonderful people are available to listen and offer more help as we need it.

I know I am not alone facing these challenges. There are more than 26,000 unpaid dementia family caregivers in Vermont.

I'm sure that many are far worse off than we are. I worry that folks who live further from medical facilities and family support have a much more difficult time navigating their present and future lives. I also suspect that a good statewide coordinator of Dementia treatment and family support could really make a difference in making excellent services available throughout the state for those families living with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia.

You can help. I'm asking you to please, as you work on bills from the House, to keep the funding for a new position of State Dementia Coordinator in the legislation so Vermont can build an equitable, efficient and sustainable system of care.