

Testimony to the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare on S. 302  
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My name is Jon Bouton. I'm a 73 year old, retired County Forester who lives in Hartford. You may remember that Judi and I testified before you last April in support of the state Dementia Coordinator position that has just been filled. Thanks!

Judi would be here, if she could. But she died in September of health problems brought on by Alzheimer's. I'm wearing her purple scarf in her memory.

A colorful, lifelong learner who was drawn to activism, Judi wanted us to support the Alzheimer's Association mission. We Walked for Alzheimers, we attended Alzheimer's awareness days here at the Capitol and testified here. Now I'm volunteering as an Alzheimer's Association Ambassador in hopes that sharing experiences from our last few years helps others. Tomorrow, Judi's scarf and I will be introducing an Alzheimer's Association program on communications at White River Junction's Bugbee Senior Center. We're working to destigmatize and make it easier to talk about dementia.

Today I'm testifying in support of S.302 An act relating to public health outreach programs regarding dementia risk.

I'm going to recount some things I could have done better if I had known more. This bill will help by charging State of Vermont Departments to 1) Increase public awareness about early signs of dementia and 2) Publicize the importance of identifying and diagnosing Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia in the early stages. This will especially help those 50, 60 and 70 year olds who, as they age, are more likely to show symptoms.

Ever since Judi's dad died with Alzheimer's, she worried that she might be predisposed. Shortly after she retired in 2016, She worried that something might be wrong. I thought it was all in her imagination. She got a referral but it would be a long time before there would be an opening. To me, that meant that there was no urgency. She got a Tele-Health appointment early in the Pandemic. The day of the appointment Judi, never set up our computer and missed it. We had each always handled our own health care so I figured that she was just not interested enough in an appointment to put the effort into following the directions for the call. Honestly, it just irritated me that she wasn't taking care of business.

Our PCP followed up when she didn't get a report and made another referral. This time we visited the doctor together. I was a shock when I saw that Judi could not complete most of the problems on the cognition test. My irritation at her behavior shifted instantly to understanding, empathy and resignation. Her irritating behavior wasn't her fault. The

doctor's diagnosis was, "early stages of dementia, probably Alzheimer's." She provided council, reading materials, a prescription and follow-up referrals with a member of her team. The diagnosis and treatment program put us on a whole new, less self-destructive pathway.

How does this relate to S. 302?

Section (B) charges state departments with increasing public understanding and awareness of the early warning signs AND of the benefits of early detection and timely diagnosis.

You may know that so far there is no cure and no way to reverse the damage caused by Alzheimer's. The drugs that came on the market last year are only available to folks in the very early stages and slow, but do not stop the decline.

Therefore recognizing signs and getting tested and diagnosing Alzheimer's in the early stages is essential for good treatment and care.

My perceptions of events leading up to her diagnosis were wrong. I misinterpreted those events. It was not all in her imagination. The long wait for an appointment was not because it wasn't important and Judi's missing the Tele-Health appointment was not due to lack of interest on her part.

Neither Judi, I, nor our friends knew enough to look out for signs of Alzheimer's and other dementias and we didn't know what those signs might be. If we'd known we could have gotten a diagnosis and the family support that comes with it sooner. Even though its too late for Judi, there are thousands of Vermonters who might not know they are in the early stages of Alzheimer's or other dementias. Knowing about and getting treatment early on is key to longer, healthier lives and gives precious time for enjoying life, friends and family.

Please support S. 302. Increasing public outreach can dramatically improve the lives of the Vermonters who will develop Alzheimer's and other dementias as they age.

Thanks for listening.