

Testimony in Support of HB 4674

My name is Diego Bonesatti. I live in East Lansing, MI and I respectfully submit this testimony in support of HB 4674.

I submit this on behalf of and because of my father, who is 92. He has diabetes, high blood pressure, wears a pacemaker and hearing aids, has a torn Achilles tendon, uses a walker and a wheelchair and takes between 16-20 medications (not an exaggeration!).

But of course, he is much more than his medical conditions. He studied, traveled and was an adventurer in his youth; worked in civil engineering until he retired at 75; he raised a family, and through it all was there for me always as a father.

Despite his health and mobility challenges, he lived independently until this year. He is not one to rely on help or ask for help unless absolutely necessary; he is proud of being independent. He even continued driving until recently, and a manual car at that! But ultimately I moved from Chicago to Detroit to be close to him (but he lived in his place and I lived in mine). I helped him organize and do major household and financial tasks, but he managed and took his own meds, drove to his lab tests and doctor appointments and did his own shopping. He has always been independent and it's always been clear that as he aged, he wanted to remain that way.

Eight months ago, he had an episode where he had to be hospitalized and then moved to a rehabilitation facility. The physical and occupational therapists did great work, and he was discharged in less than 2 months. Unfortunately, at the same time that he was released, the building that he lived in was undergoing a gut rehab. This meant that if he wanted to stay, he'd have to move twice - once to a temporary location, and then back to his apartment after they finished. This was an unfortunate confluence of factors, and we felt that the two moves would have been stressful, and moving in with me would have been another challenge due to the number of stairs in and outside my home that would've functioned like an obstacle course for a man with a walker. We knew his care needs were growing beyond what he and us, his family, could manage. At the same time, his apartment building was going through major construction, so home care was not an option. Neither was my place since there are too many stairs. So we made the tough decision to move him into an assisted living facility.

He now lives in a facility in Lansing where he has a small 1-bedroom apartment. They do their best, but he's not exactly happy there, saying, "people come here to die." Mostly, he'd like his privacy and his independence back. It's how he has always lived and having the interruption by facility staff is frustrating and hard for him.

The bigger issue - and one of the reasons I feel so passionate about the bill before you - is the cost of simply trying to provide what's best for Dad is truly shocking. We had no idea it would be this expensive. We never talked about long-term care, and we certainly didn't have a sense of how much money it would cost. In talking to my friends, I know I am not alone in feeling unprepared.

Because he has some retirement savings, Medicare won't yet cover payments for assisted living, so we're paying \$3,750 per month (and a one-time \$2,000 non-refundable deposit) out of pocket. And next year, it'll go up to \$4,000 per month. And this was by no means an expensive assisted living facility. I visited another that started at \$6,300. I didn't have the heart to tell him about that one.

We're not rich by any means - paying this monthly cost is going to be hard year after year. But, I am realizing, we're some of the luckier ones. What about all those people for years but still don't earn enough even for retirement let alone for long term care?

How do most families afford elderly care? I don't take for granted that we can stay ahead of this. Neither can most families.

After arranging care for my father, I feel it is absolutely critical for the legislature to invest a little into research that helps us figure out how to ensure the people we love can live with dignity as long as they are alive.

It feels irresponsible not to do the basic work to prevent one family crisis after another, at a time when we are at our most vulnerable and just simply want to be there for another, if it's actually preventable. Getting older is no accident, it's not a surprise. Let's plan for it. Thank you so much for considering my remarks in support of 4674.