

House Health and Government Operations Committee

HB 1168: Maryland Department of Health - Residential Service Agencies - Training Requirements

Position: FAVORABLE

March 5, 2020

Dear Chair Pendergrass and Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk,

My name is Kathy Rogers, and I have been the Executive Director of Absolute Companion Care, a licensed Residential Service Agency (RSA), providing in-home care, since 2006. On Christmas Eve 2014, my husband was diagnosed with Primary Progressive Aphasia, a rare dementia which renders one mute before taking away all other faculties. I know first hand the challenges of working with dementia, it is my entire life. To meet those challenges, we need your support for HB 1168..

As a wife, I need to know while I'm working that the staff entrusted to care for my husband are fully trained to deal with his changing needs and the challenges of dementia. As an ED for an RSA, I am committed to providing that training.

From the moment of his diagnosis, my husband volunteered for studies with Johns Hopkins and Northwestern Hospital in Chicago. We expect these professionals to never stop learning. And yet, we send troops of professional caregivers out into the day-to-day trenches without the tools they need to address the many facets of dementia.

At ACC, we currently have 85 active, fully employed professional caregivers. Our dementia training is a two-day, eight-hour program which fully immerses our staff in the causes, progression, stages, and challenges of the disease. The training gives them real life experiences, multiple theories, and methods of handling agitation, communication, disorientation and other challenges. This reduces the amount of stress, anxiety and monotony faced by many dementia clients and those that care for them. I am proud that our turnover rate is just under 20 percent, a fraction of others in our industry. I attribute this to making sure that these professional caregivers have access to the newest techniques of care management. **Unfortunately, we are an exception in a crowded field of RSA licensed providers who provide little to no training.**

Let me share with you how dementia training helps professional caregivers solve problems. A recent problem arose with a client who suddenly refused to leave her bed to use the bathroom. After listening carefully, her caregiver realized she believed herself to be on a train. Using the reality theory we teach, this caregiver downloaded a train whistle to her phone. Our client was then no longer scared she would miss her train, so she happily got out of bed. This helped to keep her muscles working and prevent skin breakdown from being bedridden.

As a care partner of a person living with dementia, I breathe easier knowing my husband will be cared for by someone educated in ways to help him that will prolong his enjoyment of life. All dementia clients should be entitled to excellent care. As an RSA provider, I am proud of the ways our caregivers have creatively solved problems after being trained to rethink their approaches. I wholeheartedly ask you to fully support HB 1168.