

*House Health Government and 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 Dee Fowlkes. I live in Annapolis. I am a caregiver for my father who lives with dementia. I represent dementia family caregivers who entrust a Residential Service Agency (RSA) to help care for a loved one.

My father was assigned an RSA to work with by the Department of Veterans Affairs. I had a meeting with the RSA manager, who said that her staff understood how to work with clients who had dementia. Unfortunately, our family was assigned a Certified Nursing Aide who was so involved with her school homework assignments, she performed less than 1 percent of her duties. For example, I requested she make sure Dad did not fall asleep watching the tv. I asked her to turn on the lights, and keep him active. While working during my part-time employment, I would text her to please keep him engaged and stimulated. She responded, "Already done." On the contrary, I found my father looking bored and sedentary. When I returned home, I was dismayed to see all the lights were off. I had to recalibrate my Dad through stimulation.

I requested a new CNA. Over time, because of experiences like this, I have taken training and learned many techniques to calm a person living with dementia, ease their distress, and empathize with their reality. As I continue to take classes on caregiving and dementia care, I share what I learn with our CNA. She listens, observes, absorbs, and applies her knowledge. Yet, she expresses there are no dementia training or requirements for workers in RSAs. She says it would be beneficial if she and her fellow CNAs received dementia training.

Recently, our contracted RSA underwent a major reorganization and ownership. Their new office staff informed me that our CNA would be rotated out from my home. As we move now to our third CNA, I explained to this administrator how people with dementia are comforted by a person-centered routine. If the RSA assigned a new CNA, I could not confidently leave my Dad with a stranger and feel assured the new CNA would provide the appropriate care in the absence of dementia training.

We need RSA staff--both workers and administrators--trained in the best practices for dementia care. I urge a favorable report on House Bill 1168.