

Testimony in Support of HB 839 “Labor and
Employment – Family and Medical
Leave Insurance Program - Establishment”
Submitted to the House Economic Matters Committee
February 24, 2020

I am a geriatric social worker, working with older adults with dementia and their families. I frequently see 3 scenarios:

1. Family members being fired from their jobs because of having to take time off to care for a loved one with dementia. This happens even if they have a claim under FMLA.
2. Family members quitting their jobs or “retiring early” to care for a loved one with dementia. They frequently have major financial problems, requiring my assistance to keep their lights on, keep food on the table, and to avoid eviction. The family member loses their health insurance when they leave their jobs, just when they need extra close medical and mental health care.
3. People with dementia being left at home alone in unsafe situations, because the family cannot afford to stop working. I have seen my patients in this situation become injured, cause house fires, wander away and get lost, and countless times get scammed out of their lifesavings by criminals who call them or stop by their homes.

Caregivers who are forced to choose between the financial stability of their family, and the safety and care of a person with dementia span the range of poor to middle class. They experience serious mental health problems because of the impossible situation they are in. I have personally intervened with several caregivers who felt so upset and trapped by their guilt over their loved one’s safety and precarious financial situation that they became suicidal, putting the person with dementia, the caregiver, and their entire family at risk of further instability.

Time to Care is not only the morally correct thing to do; it makes sense for the economic and social stability of our society.

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