

*Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee Hearing  
SB 725 Maryland Department of Health - Public Health Outreach Programs - Cognitive Impairment,  
Alzheimer's Disease, and Other Types of Dementia  
Position: FAVORABLE  
March 12, 2020*

Dear Chair Pinsky and Vice Chair Kagan,

I'm Evie Vander Meer from Frederick, MD. I am a member of Maryland's Virginia I. Jones Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Council representing caregivers. I also serve on a non-profit bringing education and support to families with younger-onset dementia.

Today, I testify on behalf of my husband, Mark Vander Meer, who was diagnosed with younger-onset Alzheimer's dementia at the age of 61. Mark died one year ago at the age 65. Our first crushing crisis with this disease was not at diagnosis. The crisis was our complete ignorance of the signs of dementia. We didn't know that people who are in the peak of their earning potential, community leadership, business impact and launching of their families were vulnerable to dementia. We didn't know that Mark's declining cognitive abilities fit all the Alzheimer's Association 10 Early Signs and Symptoms of Alzheimer's. Our church community was also in the dark about this disease.

Prior to Mark's diagnosis, our shared lack of Alzheimer's awareness had heartbreaking results. Mark's symptoms looked like decreasing competence. Suspicion and distrust began to twist a healthy organization like our beloved church, where Mark worked, into one that was crumbling. Everyone was disillusioned and lost confidence during this time of unknowns. Mark resigned from his position in our church before his Alzheimer's diagnosis. With an Alzheimer's diagnosis shaping Mark's short future, we were without our supporting community. We lost the chance to educate them about this disease.

We chose to benefit others while we moved through the devastation of Alzheimer's. We set on a course to share our Alzheimer's story. We were dismayed by how few people knew anything about dementia. Many conversations ended abruptly as people changed the subject to a topic in which they felt safe. The primary response we experienced was fear. When fear and ignorance lead the public, there can be no progress. Our communities need to have access to accurate information about dementia.

Do you worry when you forget where you put your keys, or can't recall a word? Ignorance about those typical actions leads to perpetuating myths about dementia. Ignorance keeps people from going to a doctor and unable to support their neighbors, friends and family when someone tells them of their dementia diagnosis.

Mark made an impact with his story and his courage. I am passionate about dementia education and support. Please support SB 725 to address Alzheimer's through public health outreach. Thank you.