

HB 456 – House Bill 456: Maryland Department of Health – Public Health Outreach Programs – Cognitive Impairment, Alzheimer’s Disease, and Other Types of Dementia

February 12, 2020

Dear Chairwoman Pendergrass and Vice-Chair Pena-Melnyk,
Good afternoon I am Dee Fowlkes, representing the Alzheimer's Association, and I'm here to address the proposal of House Bill 456, because we need better information about Alzheimer's.

On December 28, 2016, my uncle--while untreated with dementia--was riding his bicycle on West Street at 5:30 p.m.; he was hit by a car and suffered a traumatic brain injury. Within seven months, my uncle died due to the lack of proper care and denial of his disease.

Several months later, I started taking classes given by the Alzheimer's Association to be educated about the disease in September 2017. My father asked if I would leave my employment to care for him, and then was diagnosed with dementia. I took more classes from the Department of Aging and Disabilities from Anne Arundel County, Baltimore County, as well as Baltimore City. As I continued to be educated, my Dad asked that same questions, and I ignored them time after time.

On July 29, 2018, my dad fell during one of his 4 mile walks and it changed my life forever. The ER doctor said, well, I think it's time for you to consider putting your father in a nursing home. During the three weeks of close monitoring my Dad, I decided to resign from federal employment. Since then, I decided to make my Dad's last years his best; I am his full-time caregiver and advocate.

This legislation talks about getting better information to the public, and I will tell you, we need it. Howard County and the Alzheimer's Association had a program called PRISMS, to help people with all types of dementia. It ended on December 18, 2019. This devastated my Dad as well as his friends and their families. I don't know about any other program in the State of Maryland specifically designed for people with dementia; not from the Health Department, not from the Department of Aging, not anybody else. People in my community aren't getting information.

Through Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center and with the Blessings from my Pastor, I enrolled into the Lay Health Educators Program. I created the Health & Wellness 2020 Program of health seminars within my community. It involves 2 churches - Fowler's and John Wesley United Methodist Churches. Every month both churches has a seminar on healthier living, prevention, brain health, and early awareness. There are so many opportunities for the government to work with organizations like us to get better information out there. They don't do it enough.

If we had a public service announcement that would address this disease with the top 10 signs the way the Diabetes Council addressed their campaign, African Americans and Latinos won't have trouble learning and discussing it. African Americans and Latinos get this disease 2 and 1 1/2 times more then Caucasians.

Last month I learned my aunt has this disease. My family is in denial and having a hard time acknowledging it.

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We need early detection and education. We need more information, sooner. As I said I am here for you to pass the House Bill 456, Public Health Outreach Programs Cognitive Impairment also Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia. Please vote yes for it. Thank you so much to the committee for the opportunity to speak.