

Chair Carpenter and Members of the House Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Elaine Belardo, and I am testifying as a proponent of SB-88 Requiring Dementia Training for the State Long Term Care Ombudsman's Office. My experience with the State Long Term Care Ombudsman's Office occurred in June 2021. My husband, Rear Admiral (Retired) Jose H. Belardo III, was diagnosed with Early Onset Alzheimer's disease at the age of fifty. It was my honor to be his caregiver, and his remarkable character was never touched by the brutality of Alzheimer's.

As a 100% permanently disabled veteran my husband was afforded benefits in accordance with his disability rating that provided emergency long term care placement in my absence. Five years into the disease, my husband was in the later stages by 2021, and was mostly nonverbal, able to feed himself, but needed help with all activities of daily living and navigating the day. In mid-June 2021, my highly active and physically able 86-year-old mother became suddenly ill. A Veterans Administration Registered Nurse and Social Worker helped plan my husband's Long Term Care placement with full understanding of his needs as a late-stage Alzheimer's patient. He was placed for ten days, and I left to tend to my mother who died two days after my arrival. While I was away, friends visited and checked on my husband every day for eight days. I returned on the ninth day to find that he was highly agitated, fearful and had a black eye, and a large hematoma in the center of his forehead. When I asked what happened, it was explained that he went to bed in stable condition and was found asleep in bed the next morning with a black eye and bruising on his face. It was further explained that it was an unwitnessed fall, and he must have fallen out of bed, and then put himself back to bed. I left written instructions that he did know how to get into a bed and had to be placed in bed and covered. For him to be found in the bed, asleep with covers after a fall would require quite a bit of help. I looked for ways to advocate for him. I spoke with the State Long Term Care Ombudsman's Office expecting a response to my concerns that he was assaulted, advocacy, and an investigation. In the end, they created a scenario that my husband did not have capacity to conduct and labeled the incident an unwitnessed fall that required no investigation. Even after I explained the improbability of the scenario based on how far the disease had progressed, and my nightly experience as his caregiver, I was told "you never know what a person with Alzheimer's will do." Lack of knowledge about late-stage Alzheimer's dementia, stigma and stereotyping people with dementia left no room for the Ombudsman to act on my husband's behalf. For so long, I have wrestled with why such a fine gentleman like my husband had to endure painful mistreatment in a Long-Term Care facility. I am hopeful that sharing the deeply painful experience my beloved husband endured will be a catalyst for change in the State Long Term Care Ombudsman's Office. Increasing knowledge, awareness and understanding of the unique needs of people with a dementia diagnosis in Long Term Care facilities is my hope for SB-88. I urge the committee to support SB-88.

Respectfully submitted,

Elaine Belardo