

ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION®

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RE: Testimony on HB 4909-4912

Chairwoman Breen and Members of the Committee,

There are currently more than 190,000 Michigan residents living with Alzheimer's disease and all other dementias. This number is projected to grow by 15.8% to 220,000 by 2025.

The Michigan State Legislature can act to ensure those serving people living with a dementia receive basic training on the disease. Many people living with a dementia will eventually need to have a guardian appointed to protect their interests. However, there is currently no required training for guardians on Alzheimer's or dementia. Guardians, charged with the protection of this vulnerable population, are not required to receive any training.

Michigan needs to ensure that all guardians and guardians ad litem receive the bare minimum of training on dementia, so they can effectively serve a person living with the disease. Public guardians and guardians ad litem should be required to complete an annual, basic, hour-long dementia training.

With only a 45% diagnosis rate of Alzheimer's, educating guardians and guardians ad litem on the disease is critical to expanding understanding on how to better care for those living with Alzheimer's who are served by guardians. One of the principal attributes of this disease is the heartbreaking reality that as the disease progresses, the person's decision-making abilities erode and they can no longer make sound legal decisions - let alone make sure that those decisions are in their best interest.

The inclusion of guardians ad litem could be very important due to the role they play in the appointment of a guardian. These individuals should also be required to complete an annual, basic, hour-long dementia training. According to the state Bar of Michigan, once a guardianship petition has been filed, the court will appoint a guardians ad litem to represent the incapacitated individual, unless the individual has his or her own attorney. Before the hearing date, the court may also order the individual to be examined by a physician or mental health professional and to submit a report to the court about the individual's condition.

The guardian ad litem will personally visit the incapacitated individual and explain certain things, including what has been requested in the petition, the incapacitated individual's rights, and what can happen at the hearing. The guardian ad litem will also ask the individual what he or she wants the court to do about the petition. The guardian ad litem will tell the individual the name of the person who requested the guardianship and who might be appointed as a guardian.

The Alzheimer's Association has developed a training program, free of charge, on the basics of Alzheimer's disease and dementia for adult protective services (APS) and community services workers who may come into contact with individuals living with dementia. Several states that have passed guardian training requirements have used this program to fit that requirement. This training program includes relevant content about the basics of Alzheimer's and dementia, communication and behaviors, and safety risks. The goal is to empower state agencies to provide training to their staff. This training is not intended to be an in-person training delivered by the Association. The training takes approximately one hour to complete.

The Alzheimer's Association Michigan Chapter urges the committee to pass HB 4909-4912 with the inclusion of annual dementia training.

Thank you for your consideration.

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