

October 28, 2009

Aging and Older Adult Services Committee Public Hearing
Testimony of Representative Deberah Kula

Good morning, Chairman Mundy, Chairman Hennessey, Honorable Committee Members and guests. Thank you for conducting this hearing and affording me the opportunity to testify.

- Alzheimer's is the most common form of dementia, a general term for memory loss and other intellectual abilities serious enough to interfere with daily life.
- More women than men have Alzheimer's and other dementias, primarily because women live longer, on average, than men, and their longer life expectancy increases the time during which they could develop Alzheimer's or other dementia.
- As many as 5.3 million Americans are living with Alzheimer's disease.
- The number of people aged 65 and older with Alzheimer's disease in Pennsylvania is estimated to reach 280,000 next year.
- Every 70 seconds, someone develops Alzheimer's.
- Alzheimer's has no current cure.

I had never even heard of Alzheimer's until around 1996 when my mother was diagnosed with the beginning stages.

At that time she lived on her own in an elderly high rise apartment. I noticed her becoming more and more forgetful. In an hour's time, she would tell you the same story three or four times.

When she awoke from a nap one day and thought it was morning and for the second time within four hours took her medication which caused her blood pressure to sky rocket, I knew she could not live alone anymore.

That is when she came to live with me and my husband. I was a District Judge at that time and my husband worked in security at a local manufacturing plant. We hired a sitter through a local agency to care for my mother while we were at work. But after 5:00 we were on our own. It seemed that Mom's symptoms worsened when the sun went down. She would become more restless and confused. I had to sleep in the same room with her because she would get up and wander during the night.

As time went on she could not bathe dress or feed herself. This meant constant care. She could not carry on a conversation and most times what she did say made no sense. The hardest part of all was that my mother did not know who I was.

Her heart condition began to worsen and she developed clots from circulatory problems. Because of her medical needs and the toll it was taking on me, we placed her in a local nursing home. She was there until January 14, 2001 when she died.

I now have an older sister in that same home suffering from Alzheimer's. I pray every day that a cure for this horrible disease will be found. This prayer is not only to spare me but probably more to spare my children the horrible, helpless reality of watching someone you love die long before they take their last breath.