

The Village Common of Rhode Island

Aging Better Together

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

The Honorable Susan R. Donovan, Chair

Testimony by H. Philip West, Jr., on February 25, 2025,

in support of 25-H 5352 by Rep. Julie A. Casimiro, et. al.

Rhode Island Coordinator of Dementia Services

Thank you, Chairwoman Donovan and members of the House Committee on Health and Human Services for this hearing. **I testify in strong support for 25-H 5352 by Rep. Julie Casimiro, legislation that would guide the creation of a Dementia Services Coordinator within the Department of Health.**

My name is H. Philip West, Jr., and I serve as a volunteer lobbyist on behalf of The Village Common of Rhode Island, a statewide non-profit that deploys a wide array of volunteer supports to help older adults live safely and independently in their homes. We coordinate crucial services through locally organized and operated villages that serve older adults in Barrington, Burrillville, Cranston, Glocester, Middletown, Newport, Pawtucket, Portsmouth, Providence, and Westerly. We are currently helping form new local villages in Bristol-Warren, Exeter, Cumberland, Jamestown, and Warwick. We also serve two groups that have often been isolated: (1) A Southside Providence Village has an active Spanish-speaking caregiver support group, and (2) A statewide community of aging LGBTQ+ members in a Pride Circle. All told, the Village Common now has 525 members and 355 volunteers. Our approach saves money and lives. Our motto is: "Aging Better Together."

We in the Village Common strongly support Rep. Casimiro's legislation that would (1) Direct the Department of Health to create a Dementia Services Coordinator, (2) Define duties that will significantly improve coordination of dementia-related services throughout Rhode Island, (3) Improve data collection, agency accountability, and family support.

Alzheimer's Disease and related dementias have increased significantly in recent years. The [2024-2029 State Plan for Rhode Island Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders](#) by Lt. Gov. Sabina Matos and Interim Director of Health Utpala Bandy summarizes the work over several years of an outstanding stakeholder Advisory Council. This plan accurately describes increasing rates of dementias and strategies needed to address widespread needs. The plan proposes strategic goals and specific objectives that need to be addressed (1) in communities, particularly for those living with dementia and their caregivers, (2) in the professional workforce that serves patients and their caregivers, (3) in the health system, which will need to increase and coordinate services, and (4) in a public health approach to ever-growing needs for dementia care. The report provides a roadmap that appears doable in Rhode Island.

But implementing this plan will require professional knowledge, wise collaboration, and diligent work over many years. **Rep. Casimiro's legislation to create a Dementia Services Coordinator within the Department of Health is clearly the right next step for implementing this vital report. On behalf of The Village Common, I urge the Committee on Health and Human Services to recommend 25-H 5352 for passage by the full House.**

Respectfully,



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