



May 26, 2026

RE: **Testimony Supporting SB 2084** to increase the personal needs allowance for nursing home residents

Dear Chair DiPalma and Honorable Committee Members,

I am writing in my capacity as the Rhode Island State Long Term Care Ombudsman in support of SB 2084, which would support an increase in the personal needs allowance for Rhode Island nursing home residents receiving Medicaid. The current amount is simply not enough to allow residents to maintain dignity, independence, and connection to the people and activities that give their lives meaning.

For many residents, this small monthly allowance must cover every personal expense outside of basic care haircuts, clothing, toiletries, snacks, gifts for loved ones, phone service, and other everyday items most people take for granted. Residents should not have to choose between personal hygiene and participating in family traditions.

I think often of one of my favorite residents, Hazel. Hazel was a retired school teacher who spent her life educating and caring for children. She worked hard, saved responsibly, and contributed to her community for decades. But like many older adults, she simply outlived her savings and eventually had to rely on Medicaid for long term care.

Hazel had 12 grandchildren and great-grandchildren combined. One of the greatest joys in her life was celebrating their birthdays. She wanted nothing extravagant only to send each child \$10 for their birthday every year so they would know their grandmother was thinking of them. But the money did not work. By the time she paid for basic personal needs and something as simple as getting her hair done, there was not enough money left.

No grandmother who spent her life giving to others should have to choose between maintaining her appearance and sending a small birthday gift to the children she loves. These are not luxuries. They are the simple human experiences that preserve dignity, identity, and emotional well-being.

The residents in Rhode Island nursing homes are veterans, teachers, parents, factory workers, caregivers, and taxpayers who spent their lives contributing to society.



They deserve more than survival. They deserve the ability to live with dignity and maintain meaningful connections with family and community.

An increase in the personal needs allowance would provide residents with greater independence, improve quality of life, and recognize their humanity. Even a modest increase would make a significant difference for thousands of Rhode Island nursing home residents.

I respectfully ask you to advocate for this important change. Thank you for your time and for all of your work on behalf of Rhode Islanders.

Respectfully submitted,

Lori Light  
Rhode Island State Long Term Care Ombudsman