

H. Philip West Jr.

March 12, 2026

The Honorable Melissa A. Murray, Chair  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

**Support 26-S 2874**

Thank you, Chair Murray and members of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services for considering 26-S 2874 by Senators DiPalma, Valverde, Ujifusa, and Lauria. This legislation would create a dedicated Dementia Services Coordinator within the Department of Health. We need this kind of focused support to make headway against dementias.

My name is H. Philip West Jr. I'm 84, and age is slowing me down. I've stopped serving as volunteer lobbyist for the Village Common of Rhode Island. I submit this testimony only as a private citizen, but I assure you the Village Common and other nonprofits that work with older adults strongly support 26-S 2874.

Dementia-related disorders remain among the most devastating maladies older adults suffer. In recent years I've sat with friends and colleagues who were literally losing their minds under the relentless assault of dementia-related disorders. I remember them in their prime: a pioneering digital imaging technician, a compassionate national nonprofit executive, a brilliant naturalist, a successful business owner. They were devoted spouses, parents, and grandparents. They had devoted major portions of their lives to making the lives of others longer, safer, happier, and more fulfilling. But the onset of Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and other dementias threw their lives into downward spirals that ended in premature deaths.

Their final struggles were agonizing but not unique. The Alzheimer's Association estimates that between 475 and 500 people die of these dementias each year in Rhode Island.

But there is a way forward. The [2024-2029 State Plan for Rhode Island Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders](#) summarizes the work of an outstanding stakeholder advisory council. Their 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.

I urge the Senate Health and Human Services Committee to recommend Senator DiPalma'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.

Senator DiPalma's legislation to create a Dementia Services Coordinator within the Department of Health is clearly the right next step for implementing this vital report. I urge the Health and Human Services Committee to recommend 26-S 2874 for passage by the full Senate.

Sincerely,



H. Philip West Jr