



February 17, 2014

TO: House Committee on Health Care
Chair Mitch Greenlick; Vice-Chairs Alissa Keny-Guyer & Jim Thompson
Representatives Brian Clem, Jason Conger, Chris Harker,
Bill Kennemer, John Lively, & Jim Weidner

FROM: Public Policy Committee (May D. Dasch)

SUBJECT: Senate Bill 1577-- Regarding Missing Vulnerable Adults
with Cognitive Impairments

TESTIMONY

The Alzheimer's Network of Oregon, headquartered in the mid-Willamette Valley, strongly supports Senate Bill 1577-- often referred to as the "Silver Alert Bill". Our nonprofit organization (501c3) provides support, education, and outreach for persons with Alzheimer's disease and related forms of dementia, and their families and caregivers. We advocate for the very special needs of these afflicted individuals.

As our population ages, particularly the "baby boomer" generation, Alzheimer's, for which there is no known cause or cure, is reaching epidemic proportions. Persons with the disease live from four to over twenty years after their symptoms first appear. Although individuals under age 65 may develop Alzheimer's, the disease usually strikes the elderly, occurring in half of those persons who are 85 years old.

Because Alzheimer's destroys memory and thinking skills, persons who still are physically active, particularly in the early years of mental deterioration, are prone to wander under a variety of circumstances. The afflicted person who still drives a car may be hopelessly lost once away from familiar surroundings. On foot, even in a well-known area, that individual may lose all sense of direction and wander afar. Another category of wanderers are those who live in Oregon's long-term care facilities-- removed from their home settings, perhaps in another city or state. Suddenly, they find themselves in a strange place with no familiar faces. The all-too-common statement, "I just want to go home", is heart-wrenching. Given an opportunity, these persons may elope, with no idea of where they are or where they are going. They face numerous hazards, such as inclement weather, traffic, falls, strangers. Facilities that are short-staffed, or lack adequately trained staff, find it difficult to handle the resident who is determined to leave.

Alzheimer's is a disease that impacts and exhausts families over a period of many years. Whether the afflicted person lives alone, or with a fatigued caregiver, or in a facility, the safety of that person is a constant concern. I experienced that stress, for my mother struggled with Alzheimer's for at least 17 years. If enacted, SB-1577 will give families some assurance that statewide policies and procedures are in place to help. I urge you to support passage of this bill. Thank you.