

I'm the facilitator of the Memory Loss Support Group (for caregivers and family members of people with Alzheimer's and other dementias) at the Corvallis Community Center.

My first contact with this subject came when my mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. I was her sole caregiver for seven years of her illness.

Members of my group include both spouses and children of patients, and issues range from pre-diagnosis to end-of-life care.

At some point, home care always becomes too difficult, and it is necessary to turn to facility care. Making that decision, and picking the best facility, are among the hardest choices that caregivers and families must make.

Members of my group with their loved ones currently in facilities are the best source of information to make this choice, because facilities are constantly changing. Ownership changes, administrators change, and most importantly caregiver staffing levels change.

In my experience, caregiver staffing levels are the single most important consideration, and problem, in facility care. Our group has repeatedly seen excellent and preferred facilities lose that status because the level of care has declined due to caregiver staffing cuts. Sometimes the care decline is so drastic that it is necessary to move the patient for their welfare and safety.

It has been hard for me to hear reports of patients left filthy and neglected, unprotected from falls, and wasting away because they were unprompted to eat. Moreover, fewer caregivers tends to lead to overmedicating patients so that they need less attention.

I recommend to group members that they report problems to the Ombudsman, but as the law stands the Ombudsman lacks the power to change conditions.

Our society, our state, should do better than this. I urge passage of this bill as a first step to giving our most vulnerable the dignity and safety they deserve. Someday that person may be you.