

February 8, 2021

To: Chair Williams and Members of the House Committee on Human Services  
From: Sara Kofman, Alzheimer's Association Oregon and Southwest Washington Chapter  
**Subject: Support for HB 2394**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2394, legislation preventing the social isolation of individuals in long-term care settings during public emergencies.

The last eleven months have been an incredibly challenging time for individuals and families affected by Alzheimer's disease and all other dementia. Long-term care communities in Oregon have closed their doors to visitors due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in an effort to ensure the protection and safety of residents and staff. However, as the coronavirus pandemic continues, the growing concerns about the impact of social isolation among people with dementia in long-term care must be addressed. Social isolation can exacerbate symptoms of dementia as well as contribute to a decline in cognitive abilities and even hasten death. We are dealing with a profoundly difficult situation throughout this pandemic in that the isolation policies implemented to protect individuals in long-term care, including those with dementia, is also exacerbating their disease. It does not have to be this way and there are actions that can be taken to help prevent social isolation in long-term care. Supporting the passage of HB 2394 is a good first step.

HB 2394 requires long-term care facilities to create an isolation prevention plan and include it in the facility's emergency response plan. The isolation prevention plan must ensure that appropriate technology, staff support, and other capabilities are available to prevent the facility's residents from becoming isolated during public emergencies. The legislation requires that residents have access to use of electronic or virtual methods, including computer technology, the Internet, social media, videoconferencing or other technological methods to facilitate communication and engagement. The legislation also requires that residents with disabilities that might impede their ability to communicate have access to assistive and supportive technology.

Currently, a number of Oregon's long-term care communities are putting an emphasis on addressing social isolation and supporting opportunities for virtual visitation. Unfortunately, some facilities are not. HB 2394 will make addressing social isolation in long-term care a priority for all. Social engagement has many benefits for an individual with dementia and can help to promote independence, self-confidence and ultimately enhance quality of life.

Alzheimer's is more than just a disease about memory loss and it is not a normal part of aging. Alzheimer's disease is a fatal and progressive disease that attacks the brain, killing nerve cells and tissue, affecting an individual's ability to remember, think, plan and ultimately function. It is the sixth leading cause of death in our state. Today, an estimated 69,000 Oregonians are living with Alzheimer's disease. By 2025 – barring the development of medical breakthroughs to prevent, stop or slow Alzheimer's disease – this number is projected to grow by more than 20 percent.

For these reasons and more, the Alzheimer's Association supports the passage of HB 2394. Thank you for your consideration of this important issue. Please contact Sara Kofman at [skofman@alz.org](mailto:skofman@alz.org) with any questions.