March 31, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services.

My name is Mary Dysart Hartt. I have lived and worked in the Bangor area my entire life and am a caregiver to my husband living with Alzheimer's, Mike. I wish to testify in strong support of Senator Stacey Guerin's bill, L.D. 1102, to provide funding to raise more awareness of Alzheimer's disease and dementia, brain health, and risk reduction.

My hope is that, in sharing my story, others who are impacted by this disease will feel less alone and understand that with proper supports, there is life after diagnosis.

Mike was 58 when I started noticing that things did not seem quite right. After living on our family farm since 1977, daily tasks like running the tractor became a challenge and fender benders became more frequent. During that same time, I was part of a family care team caring for my mother who was living with dementia. She was a brave woman who was never afraid to forge her own path. She started our family-owned business, Dysart's, with my father 52 years ago and my two brothers and I are very proud to have carried on our parents dream into the third generation.

I began to see similarities in the challenges they were both facing and decided to reach out to our family doctor who agreed to help me monitor Mike for changes. For four years we continued on this path, with things coming to a head when Mike was 62. When Mike was 62, he agreed to be tested. We turned to a hospital in Bangor for help and a diagnosis. After enduring test after test, Mike was diagnosed with frontotemporal dementia, or FTD, and given five years to live. In an effort to understand the diagnosis and what lay ahead, we contacted our insurance provider who referred us to Massachusetts General Memory Clinic in Boston. We are so thankful for the care we received at Mass General where after more tests, his diagnosis was changed to younger-onset Alzheimer's disease. Following the diagnosis, life changed significantly. We sold our farm where we had lived for nearly 40 years and condensed our life. At 63, Mike volunteered to give up driving, a freedom that was too dangerous to continue.

Before Mike was diagnosed, we were not familiar with younger-onset Alzheimer's disease, but had some knowledge of Alzheimer's and dementia through the experience of caring for my mother. One common assumption about this disease is that life stops completely. While we've faced unique challenges as we've tackled this disease, we continue to move forward with our life as best we can.

Since our journey with Alzheimer's began, it's been my mission to help rid the stigma of this disease. I've run in marathons, sold "Purpleberry pies," written to local papers, been interviewed by the media, and even testified before the U.S. Special Committee on Aging all to raise awareness of Alzheimer's and encourage people to not be afraid of having conversations when something doesn't feel right.

These opportunities are important, and I will continue to pursue them, but they do not happen on a consistent basis like public service announcements. The funding and awareness program that Senator Guerin is proposing would help us reach more Mainers with important information about brain health and encouraging people to seek help.

Early diagnosis helped us make adjustments for our life and plan for the future so that we could enjoy our time together and with family. But we know that many families are still reluctant to talk about dementia or address it as something different than a normal part of aging. If we are going to improve life for people living with Alzheimer's like Mike, we have to be comfortable talking about it and not hiding the issue.

Thank you for your time,

Mary Dysart Hartt