

Date: March 18, 2021

To: Chair Gelser and Members of the Senate Committee on Human Services, Mental Health and Recovery

From: Sara Kofman, Alzheimer's Association Oregon & Southwest Washington Chapter

Subject: SB 714

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for SB 714, legislation that would establish minimum staffing ratios for residential care facilities and facilities with memory care endorsements.

The Alzheimer's Association is the world's leading voluntary health organization in Alzheimer's care, support, and research. We work in strategic partnership with our sister organization, the Alzheimer's Impact Movement (AIM), to make Alzheimer's a national priority. Together, the Alzheimer's Association and AIM advocate for policies to fight Alzheimer's disease, including increased investment in research, improved care and support, and advancement of approaches to reduce the risk of developing dementia.

The Alzheimer's Association recognizes direct care staff as the single most important determinant of quality dementia care across all care settings. These professional caregivers help to shape the daily lives of people with dementia and assist with all aspects of physical care. Through their close interactions with people with dementia, direct care workers gain an in-depth knowledge of the individual, including their preferences, behaviors and functioning. The ability of these health care professionals to provide quality dementia care is jeopardized due to high levels of turnover and job dissatisfaction due to low pay, difficult working conditions, and limited opportunities for career advancement. Increased attention to the needs of this workforce could lead to increased job satisfaction and retention but can also increase the quality of care for those with dementia.

The Alzheimer's Association maintains a neutral position on SB 714 as we believe staffing must be part of a larger conversation around workforce issues in Oregon's long-term care system. To assure quality care for persons with Alzheimer's disease and dementia, providers should hire and maintain sufficient numbers of staff that are well trained in dementia care. As such, the Alzheimer's Association supports the following principles to guide workforce policy and assure quality dementia care across all long-term care setting:

- Staffing levels should be adequate to allow for proper care at all times—day and night.
- Staff should be sufficiently trained in all aspects of care, including dementia care.
- Staff should be adequately compensated for their valuable work.
- Staff should work in a supportive atmosphere that appreciates their contributions to overall quality care. Improved working environments will result in reduced turnover in all care settings.
- Staff should have the opportunity for career growth.
- Staff should work with families in both residential care settings and home health agencies.

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.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue. Please contact Sara Kofman at skofman@alz.org with any questions.