My name is Ruth Burress and I am testifying as a proponent of House Bill 2536 – which requires dementia training for all court-appointed guardians who are assigned to those with dementia or cognitive decline.

I was a caregiver for my husband, Charles, who was diagnosed with Early Onset Alzheimer's at the age of 51. I had been around Alzheimer's for several years prior to that because other family members had the disease, so I understood what we would be dealing with. However, I still needed to educate myself regarding the best way to care for him.

I found that many of the challenges associated with dementia can be managed when approached with the right knowledge. Using the wrong approach or not understanding what can possibly help in a specific situation, can often lead to crisis—emergency medical visits, institutional placement, or repeated court involvement—outcomes that are difficult for the individual and are very costly for the system. Having the knowledge to deal with the challenges of Alzheimer's disease allowed me to keep my husband in our home until the last year of his life.

Since the primary role of the guardian is to act in the best interest of the individual, dementia specific training is essential for them to be able make good decisions for the individuals they are responsible for. The ability to deal with situations and understand how to effectively communicate with the individual will help avoid the type of crisis that could lead to costly outcomes.

Family caregivers are often expected to educate themselves about dementia in order to provide appropriate care. It is reasonable and consistent with best practices to expect court-appointed guardians, who hold significant authority over another person's life, to have similar foundational knowledge which the support of this bill would provide.

Fortunately, I was able to care for my husband, but many aren't so fortunate to have the support they need and must rely on the court system.

I urge the committee to support HB 2536.

If you have additional questions, I will stand for them at the appropriate time.

Thank you for your time.

Ruth Burress