



MIKE ROHRKASTE

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 55TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Assembly Bill 785
Testimony of State Representative Mike Rohrkaste
Assembly Committee on Mental Health Reform
January 25, 2016

Thank you, Chair Tittl, and members of the Committee on Mental Health Reform for holding this public hearing.

I would like to start by thanking everyone who worked with the Speaker's Task Force on Alzheimer's and Dementia to bring forward the 10 bills we are hearing today. This was a bipartisan effort and I am very proud of the time and effort that each member of the task force put forward. Alzheimer's and dementia affect thousands of people in Wisconsin every day and each of these bills will help to address some of the problems these diseases cause. We have the support of both the Alzheimer's Association and the Alzheimer's and Dementia Alliance of Wisconsin on each of these bills and I would like to thank both of these groups as well as any other that worked with us throughout this process. I would also like to thank the Department of Health Services, they have been incredibly helpful and we will continue to work with them concerning these bills should the need arise.

Assembly Bill 785 creates a dementia specialist certification program and is intended for Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs), nurses, and assisted living administrators. This certification process is voluntary and would take 40 hours to complete.

During our public hearings throughout the state, the task force heard numerous times how hard it is for nursing homes to recruit and retain employees. The goal of AB 785 is to help CNAs to become even better caregivers to people with Alzheimer's and dementia while simultaneously providing them the ability to gain new skills and a path for professional development. This legislation will help nursing homes and community-based residential facilities to attract new workers as well as to retain current employees. The bill will also help to improve the quality of care provided to people with Alzheimer's and dementia.

Bottom line, passage of AB 785 will help to ensure the best care for those living with Alzheimer's and dementia and will also provide CNAs, nurses, and assisted living administrators the ability to gain a new set of skills.

Thank you for your time and I'm happy to answer any questions.



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Alzheimer's and Dementia Alliance of Wisconsin testimony in support of AB 785

Good morning Chair Tittl and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I'm Rob Gundermann, the Public Policy Director for the ADAW and I'm speaking in favor of AB 785. I would just like to start by saying that the ADAW supports all of the bills coming out of the Speaker's Task Force on Alzheimer's and Dementia. I won't be speaking on every bill but I do want you to know that shouldn't be taken as a lack of support. We support the entire package.

We all know the number of people with dementia in our state is growing dramatically and that growth is going to continue for decades. AB 785 creates a training program that would allow Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) an opportunity to get some additional skills to help them care for this growing segment of our population.

A Certified Dementia Specialist position would help to address the issue of challenging behaviors and would help us deal with those situations in place. The CDS would be trained to respond to challenging behavioral issues and would know at what point outside help needs to be called in so that the situation doesn't escalate to the point where the patient can no longer be treated in place.

Creation of a Certification process for Dementia Specialists in conjunction AB 790 creating mobile crisis units would go a long way toward addressing the aftermath of the Supreme Court ruling regarding Helen E.F. and when the patient is treated in place we avoid having to use either Chapter 51 (Mental Health) or Chapter 55 (Protective Placement).

We are aware that there are other trainings out there that people are going through related to dementia and this would in no way negate that but there is not standardization to what's currently out there. A certification process would ensure that everyone using the term "Certified Dementia Specialist" would have a standard knowledge base. Employers and the public would know the person went through a state certified training program and didn't just pay a fee to some website to obtain certification.

It's probably important to note that there is no requirement that anyone receive this training or that any facilities hire certified dementia specialists. This would be entirely voluntary.

The one change we would recommend to the bill is to remove the prohibition of the term "dementia specialist" and just restrict the term "certified dementia specialist" so we wouldn't impact the dementia specialists in the ADRCs and people who go through other trainings could still call themselves dementia specialists.

Thank you for your time and consideration.