

Congressional Testimony

U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging

“Aging in Place: The Impact of Community During the Holidays”

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Emily Ladau, Disability Rights Advocate and Author of *Demystifying Disability*

Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Gillibrand, and distinguished Committee members, I am honored to testify on this auspicious day, as December 3 is the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

I am a proud disability advocate, and my mission is to harness the power of storytelling as a tool to expand accessibility and inclusion for all. As a 34-year-old, my story may seem out of place at a hearing about aging in place, but the disability perspective is especially pertinent to today’s focus on the impact of community. I want to emphasize that more than 1 in 4 adults in the United States have a disabilityⁱ, and of this group, 43.9% are adults aged 65 or older.ⁱⁱ For those who are not yet disabled, there is a significant likelihood of aging into having a disability. Neither a person’s age nor disability status should ever be a barrier to being among loved ones in our homes and communities.

When I was a teenager, my parents and I took a trip to Florida to visit my grandparents for a holiday celebration. At the time, my grandpa was in the midst of an extended hospital stay, but his doctor permitted him to come home for a few hours to join us for a holiday meal. As my family was cooking, I sat with my grandpa while he opened the day’s mail. He began to weep over the simple act of being able to do a task in his own home. It’s the only time I ever saw him cry. As I look back on this moment, I realize just how strongly it underscores the immense importance of being home—and not just for the holidays.

I was born with my physical disability, so I know well the essential nature of supports and services that empower me to thrive at home and in my community, and how fortunate I am to have had access to them throughout my life. When my mom—who has the same disability as me—was born in 1961, a family member suggested my grandparents place her in an institution. Thirty years later, when I was born, no one made this suggestion to my parents. Instead, following my stay in the neonatal intensive care unit, a public health nurse connected my mom with resources to ensure I’d receive the care I needed.

Because of this, I was able to have regular physical, occupational, and speech therapy starting at just a few months old. By the time I began kindergarten, I was approved for ongoing home and community-based services, or HCBS, thanks to the New York State Care at Home Medicaid Waiver.

Medicaid provided me access not only to vital therapeutic services, but also to home modifications that enabled me to function as independently as possible in my family's home. Medicaid also assisted in the acquisition of durable medical equipment, such as my power wheelchair. As you can see by the fact that I am here today, my wheelchair gives me freedom to be out and about in the community.

Unfortunately, the Medicaid asset limit, which has been a mere \$2,000 for over 35 years, became prohibitive to my future career and relationship goals. In my early 30s, I found myself at an inflection point. I wanted to forge ahead in my career and build a life with my partner, but I was trapped in an inflexible system that imposes caps and penalties on people in exchange for access to life-sustaining services. So, with family support, which most people cannot afford, I took a risk and decided not to reapply for Medicaid.

That said, what I am sharing is not a success story about transitioning off Medicaid, as this choice has meant foregoing needed care, such as in-home physical therapy multiple times per week, which I can only access through the Medicaid program. The story here is that HCBS provided by Medicaid were what set me up for success.

This past October, I married the love of my life. My husband and I are now seeking a community to call home near our families in New Jersey. We're searching for somewhere accessible for my physical needs at this stage of our lives as well as for our future needs so we can safely age in place. This search has proven arduous in a housing market where accessible homes are nearly nonexistent.

Our experiences are a stark reminder that the stakes of today's hearing are much higher than heartwarming tales of being home for the holidays. Without access to HCBS and without efforts to prioritize housing and communities that work for everyone, people with disabilities and older adults will all too easily be pushed out of our homes and communities and into institutionalized settings—denied opportunities for everything from education and employment to recreation and socialization.

But we won't be the only ones missing out. Our friends, families, colleagues, and neighbors will miss out on all we can contribute to our communities both socially and economically. This isn't just about making treasured holiday memories with loved ones, although that's a beautiful part of the human experience. It's also about fostering a country where all of us can grow older assured by the notion that we will always have a place to call home.

Thank you.

ⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Disability Impacts All of Us Infographic. Accessed November 26, 2025. <https://www.cdc.gov/disability-and-health/articles-documents/disability-impacts-all-of-us-infographic.html>.

ⁱⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, Division of Human Development and Disability. Disability and Health Data System (DHDS) Data. Accessed November 26, 2025. <https://dhds.cdc.gov>