

US Senate Special Committee on Aging
Senior Elder Care Relief and Empowerment (SECURE) Act

Testimony of Flora “Grandma” Green
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Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, I am Flora Green, the National Spokesperson for The Seniors Coalition (TSC). On behalf of our organization and its four million members and supporters, I would like to thank you for convening this hearing and for your continued work on behalf of America’s senior citizens – particularly those in need of Long Term Care services and their families who donate their homes, time, and financial resources to care for them. I am honored to have been invited to testify this morning, and emphasize our support for the passage of the Senior Elder Care Relief and Empowerment, or SECURE, Act; and I wish to thank you for the opportunity to do so.

According to the National Center on Care giving, 12.1 million Americans require assistance to carry out simple, every-day activities that you and I may take for granted. 6.4 million of these Americans are ages 65 and over, and nearly 2/3 of these seniors depend upon family members as their only source of help.

Family care giving is an essential – and often overlooked – component of long term care in this country. Approximately 7 million people spend an average of 17.9 hours per week caring for their elderly family members. In addition, The National Alliance for Care giving reported that over 64 percent of these caregivers have full- or part-time jobs, and many times are forced to take decreased hours, and unscheduled leave in order to fulfill their responsibilities as a caregiver. These individuals sacrifice much in order to provide the noble and compassionate service of caring for their elderly family members, and they deserve our full support.

Supporting these caregivers does not mean utilizing more subsidies for institutional care. Today, 79 percent of those seniors who require long term care services prefer the dignity and security that comes with living in their home, with family, or in a community setting rather than being institutionalized.

I recently spoke with Patricia McCarthy Michel, in Florida, who told me her personal story involving her mother who became very ill with Hodgkin's Lymphoma in December of 2002. She told me that her mother had always been very independent and had taken care of all of her personal and physical needs up until this point. By March 2003, it became necessary for her mother to move in with her. Her mother only lived until the first of May, 2003. In that short time

frame of less than two months, over \$2,000 in expenses were incurred. These expenses included unreimbursable costs by Medicare/HMO and home health visits that were necessary to assist her.

In addition to Patricia, I also spoke with a Mr. Brown who is in desperate need of help in caring for his 85 year old father who has a leg amputated above the knee, a major stroke in 2001, and several heart attacks that have left him virtually bedridden. Mr. Brown informed me that he is caring for his father 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, bathing him, preparing and administering his medications, feeding him and providing wound care and physical therapy.

These are just but two stories of everyday, humble Americans who are faced with the unavoidable burden of caring for loved ones; a burden which they must add to their regular everyday responsibilities. That the social group to which these individuals belong may include some with limited means simply adds to the problem which this legislation is designed to address.

On behalf of The Seniors Coalition and its 4 million members, I strongly urge you, Mr. Chairman and members of this distinguished Committee, to stand in support of the SECURE Act and urge the Senate to move forward with the proposed law.