

Testimony of Gretchen Spring

Senate Committee on Aging

Affordable Prescriptions Now: Examining Legislation to Lower Costs for Seniors

July 1, 2022

Senator Warnock, thank you for having me here today to speak about my experience with expensive prescription drugs. My experience is unfortunately all too common.

My name is Gretchen Spring. I am a proud 74 years old and I'm a resident of Marietta, GA. Presently, I am a widow and retired caregiver. In 2016 my husband, Peter, was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease by a neuropsychiatrist. During my 6 years of being a caregiver, I had to keep us as active as possible or my husband, my best friend, would have passed away a year or two sooner.

On April 7 of this year, after almost 17 years of marriage, the love of my life passed after reaching Stage 7 of Alzheimer's disease. In fact, would have marked our 17th anniversary.

His condition had required him to use many different medications – 11 total. He was on Eliquis for a heart condition and Namenda, a medication to slow down the process of Alzheimer's disease. We were paying an arm and a leg for Eliquis and Namenda, spending \$250 to \$300 a month per medication— and that was with insurance. I was even on a first name basis with everyone at the Pharmacy due to my weekly visits. We were in our Golden Years but the only people that were seeing gold were the pharmaceutical companies.

And this was in addition to the costs for my own prescription drugs. I take four different prescriptions, and in addition to my husband's 11 medications— the cost was overwhelming.

Peter and I had Part D coverage through a Medicare Advantage plan, but my husband's medications broke the bank. We're talking about \$800 to \$1,000 out of pocket every month. With 15 prescriptions between the two of us, we would easily spend at least \$12,000 in a year on medication alone.

I loved Peter dearly and I did what I could to keep him healthy. When he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, he had to leave the work force and I started my fourth career as caregiver, which played havoc in our finances. But at the same time, it was also important to me to listen to our doctors about our health. That meant putting the cost of our medications on our credit cards, sometimes maxing out our limits. And the last thing a senior citizen with a fixed income wants is to use the credit cards with 21-28 percent interest rates.

Due to my husband's expensive prescription drugs, we also had to delay making needed updates to make our home more comfortable to live in, and sometimes had to make difficult decisions about purchasing basic essentials, like groceries. At one point, we even reached out to family members about setting up a GoFundMe page because of the strain on our finances. It

was only because of a friend's generosity and our pension funds that we didn't go into debt - and we went through \$60,000 of pension money (the last payment was received in March of this year?)

As my testimony today demonstrates, addressing the high cost of prescription drugs is an issue that is personal to me. My husband has passed, but there are so many seniors and families in our state who are struggling to afford life-saving medications. Let me be clear – we don't have a choice when it comes to prescription drugs. It is simply wrong and unethical that seniors are faced with these decisions.

Senator Warnock, your leadership on this issue means a lot. Your *Capping Drug Costs for Seniors Act*, which would cap out-of-pocket costs at \$2,000 per year for people on Medicare, would have made all the difference for my husband and me. I am a proud 74 year old and it's with your continued support on lowering costs that I'm looking forward to 75 with more reasonable prescriptions costs.

In closing, it is past time that Congress addresses high prescription drug costs, and I am just one of many with a story about struggling to afford medications. Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you today. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.