

Sen. Martha McSally

Special Committee on Aging

Field Hearing – Scottsdale, AZ

Opening Statement

First, I would like to thank Senator Collins for holding this field hearing today in Scottsdale, Arizona. Welcome to the beautiful Grand Canyon State – I hope you can see why I am always excited about coming back home! Also, I want to take a moment to recognize your leadership as Chairman of the Senate Special Committee on Aging. Field hearings are a great way to bring Washington to constituents to hear about what's happening and what we can do to help.

Today's hearing will provide an opportunity to receive testimony on Alzheimer's and other cognitive diseases, which affect many aging Americans and their caregivers here in Arizona and around the country. Today is also the first day of November. As many of our friends and partners in the Alzheimer's community know, the month of November is Alzheimer's Awareness Month. When President Ronald Reagan, who himself was diagnosed with Alzheimer's after leaving office, first made that designation in 1983, there were less than 2 million people with the disease. Sadly, that number has grown threefold since that time.

In Arizona, we have the fastest growing rate of Alzheimer's disease in the U.S. Of the nearly 6 million estimated Americans aged 65

and older affected, 140,000 live in our home state. Furthermore, the death rate in Arizona is almost 20% higher than the U.S. average. We all know someone who has suffered from cognitive impairment, and the impact is immeasurable. One of my uncles suffered for many years before passing away from Alzheimer's Disease. And I have a dear friend named TK Warfield who was also my veterinarian for three dogs who is currently suffering from what his doctor now thinks is lewy-body demetia with parkinson's-like symptoms. He had to stop caring for animals which was his life passion and has been through a challenging path to find a diagnosis and best treatment. I am heartbroken but inspired by how he and his wife Donna are enduring the fight against this awful disease.

I have been a strong advocate for those suffering with cognitive diseases while serving in Congress. During my 5 years in Congress, I have supported efforts to increase the National Institutes of Health(NI) funding and I am proud to say we have seen an approximate 371% increase through those years. This year, I was honored to join with Senator Collins in requesting full and robust funding for Fiscal Year 2020 Alzheimer's research through NIH. This funding has made an impact in my home state directly, as seen through University of Arizona's impressive research. I have and will continue to strongly support this much needed research.

It is fantastic to see Arizona leading the way in putting these dollars to use in Alzheimer's and other cognitive disease research. Between our public universities, community programs and local organizations, we are paving a path forward in the fight against these diseases. Today, Dr. Roberta Brinton, the Director of The University of Arizona's Center for Innovation in Brain Science, will discuss the groundbreaking research they have been conducting as well as the impact federal funding can have on their work. We also welcome Dr. Alireza Atri, who is the Director of the Banner Sun Health Research Institute. This institute specializes in debilitating age-related diseases, and has had a significant impact on generating groundbreaking research. Along with caring for his father for 10 years, his vital research in this field has led to potential, preventative treatments for Alzheimer's as well as best practice guidelines for aging adults. We welcome you and look forward to both your testimonies.

However, despite many of these advances, we still have a long road ahead. Today, I hope to hear not only the successes we have achieved, but also the challenges we still face to fight these cognitive diseases. In 2017, in Arizona alone there were over 300,000 caregivers providing more than 376 million hours of unpaid care to those afflicted by Alzheimer's and other cognitive impairments – usually a family member. These unsung heroes sacrifice so much to care for their loved ones, and most of the time that effort goes unrewarded. They often

quietly forgo their careers and the consuming demands of caregiving can strain other relationships and roles such as spouse or parent. In addition to their own physical and mental health.

Just last week, I met with a 26-year-old son who selflessly moved back home to care full-time for his mother. This young gentleman took what was a horrific diagnosis and actually created what is now a virtual reality company which allows both cognitive and physical exercise for seniors. It is caregivers like him that allow those with these diseases to carry on as normally as possible.

I am pleased to welcome one of those caregivers today, Lisa Capp. Lisa cared for her mother for 18 years, sacrificing her time for her family. I am moved by her story and hope she can shed further light on the impact being a caregiver can have on an individual and family.

Thank you all for being here, and again thank you to Senator Collins for joining us today. Another big thanks to our witness panel who has given up their time to be with us and share their knowledge. With that, I turn it over to our first witness, Dr. Atri.