

**STATEMENT OF JEANNE M. HODGSON BEFORE THE UNITED STATES SENATE COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE**

Mr. Chairman, members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify today and to tell you the story of my mother, Annie Boyd, whose untimely and shocking passing is the reason I am here before you today.

My name is Jeanne Hodgson. I'm from Ranson, West Virginia. In October of 2000, my brother, sister and I faced the most difficult decision we have ever faced in our lives: the decision to put our mother in a nursing home. We put off this decision for quite some time. But, as our mother's Alzheimers condition quickly worsened, we felt like we had no choice. It was clear to us that Mom needed 24-hour care; care that my sister, brother, and I could not provide while holding down jobs, supporting our families and dealing with our own health problems.

We began this journey by trying to find the best home we could for mom. We chose a facility that looked nice, and the admissions staff boasted of their special Alzheimer/Dementia Special Care Unit, which offered increased supervision and frequent resident/staff interactions. You see my mom had a tendency to wander – she loved to walk. And she had fallen and her hurt herself at home, so we needed a nursing home facility that could deal with that problem.

We thought this nursing home would provide Mom with a level of care beyond anything we could give her. So, on October 12, 2000, we moved Mom into the Home.

Despite our hopes, it soon became apparent to us that she was not receiving the level of supervision promised to us. In fact, we began to realize that Mom spent most of her days wandering the nursing home halls without any proper help or supervision. Although the nursing home had promised to engage her in special activities to help with her Alzheimers, they rarely

provided them. My sister and I would each visit my Mom at least three times a week, and during those visits we began to realize the nursing home was gravely understaffed. During our individual visits, my sister and I both noticed there was not enough staff to even feed the patients. So, on more than one occasion my sister and I fed patients in need of help. During my sister's visits, she noticed that lunch trays would often come without liquids, and that pills were lying on the floor.

Within two years of Mom moving into the facility, she had sustained over 30 falls and other unexplained injuries and accidents, ranging from a regular bruises, lost teeth, and black eyes---to head lacerations requiring stitches, and a fractured left wrist. Unfortunately, we didn't know of many of these falls until after Mom's passing because they were documented, but not reported. As for the injuries we knew about, the staff claimed they had no idea what happened. It was clear to me that they didn't have adequate staffing to supervise my mom and simply could not keep her safe. We complained, we tried to work with the staff, but it didn't change anything.

As the falls and injuries became more frequent, my family started to doubt our decision. The final straw occurred in October of 2002 when Mom was admitted to Jefferson Memorial Hospital because she was suffering from severe dehydration. At that point, we were certain that the nursing home was doing a lot more harm than good. So, we made the decision to move Mom out of the facility, and we began to consider other options.

Unfortunately, our decision came too late. On November 20, 2002, around 11:15 pm, I received a knock on the door. When I opened my door, there on my front porch, was an Officer with the Charleston Police Department. He told me that my mother had died at the nursing

home. The nursing home never even called to inform my family of my mom's passing or any of the surrounding events.

As to how she died, he told me she had been hanged. My mother was found with a shower hose around her neck. It was considered a suspicious death and they were undertaking an investigation. Ultimately it was an investigation that went nowhere. The police never determined how my Mom died.

I cannot put into words how I felt at that moment, standing on the porch. The lingering feelings still haunt me today. I felt guilty for having to put my mom in such a place. I felt outrage that they could allow this to happen to such vulnerable person. Unfortunately, I can't bring our mother back, but what I can do is share this story with you. Based on our family's experience, and what I have come to know about nursing homes and elderly care since that time, I know that nursing home neglect is much more commonplace than people realize. Staff shortages at these facilities is an important problem that needs to be addressed at the national level. Rather than limit the rights of these elders through tort reform, I would ask this body to get to the root cause of this neglect. Look at how to solve the problem by addressing the staffing problems.

If by giving this testimony, I can help save even one elderly person from suffering from nursing home neglect due to staff shortages and poorly trained workers, I will have done honor to the memory of my Mom and all that she did for me and my family. Thank you