

May 6, 2008

Testimony presented to members of the House Committee on Aging and older Adult Services.

House Bill 1952

Honorable Chairman Mundy and Distinguished members of this Committee:

Good Morning:

My name is Mary K. Smithson. I reside in Washington Crossing Bucks County Pa. and would like to express my personal appreciation to Representative Katherine Watson for all of her work on trying to bring attention to a matter of great public safety and concern. I am also an elected official from Bucks County as I am Clerk of Courts of the Court of Common Pleas located in Doylestown Pa.

Sitting next to me is my Dad, William Kirwan. It is important to know who he is and what he represents in order to fully understand the devastation that has happened to our family as a result of inadequate protection for residents in nursing homes. My father was born in a small town called Girdardville, Pa. in Schuylkill County. He was one of 4 children. He left Schuylkill County in order to serve his country in World War II, as an enlisted soldier in the United States Army. After the war was over, my dad moved to Philadelphia along with his sister Regina, who married an army officer named David Householder. She and David moved to Pittsburgh and had two children, one of whom, Mary Ann Rose, is present today for this hearing.

Despite the distances and the demands of our individual families, our families remained in close contact with one another, and when Regina and David's health began to deteriorate in 2006, my father became very concerned.

We were shocked when we received a telephone call that a tragic accident had occurred with my Aunt Regina (Jean) and Uncle Dave. That tragic accident was that they had been overcome by carbon monoxide poisoning while they were patients in a nursing home.

We were devastated. How could such an incident happen? Why did this happen to them? How could we help them?? My father and I both flew out to Pittsburgh to be with Aunt Jean and Uncle Dave in early March of 2007.

I have difficulty describing to this panel the effect of the poisoning on their persons. It was unbelievable. We are a very close family and tried desperately to find the words to give comfort to my cousin, my dad's niece MaryAnn and her family. When we kissed Aunt Jean and Uncle Dave good bye, I prayed it would not be the last time we would visit with them.

I was wrong. The next time would be at their funeral. Yes they both tragically died within a week of each other. Our family tried to fly for the service and found ourselves waiting 5 hrs on a tarmac for our plane to be de-iced. Needless to say, we missed the funeral service and yes, our final goodbyes. This had an effect on all of us. Just a few months later, my Dad later suffered a small mini-stroke, so emotionally upset over the death of his beloved sister and her husband.

Aunt Jean and Uncle Dave died as a result of their exposure to carbon monoxide poisoning while they were patients in a state approved and monitored nursing facility. I anguished afterwards, how could this happen? What can I do to stop this from ever happening to another family such as ours? Why aren't carbon monoxide detectors placed as a regulation in facilities where our elderly population are being cared for?

I am SHOCKED that carbon monoxide detectors are not mandatory. How can this be?

After my anger subsided, I decided to take action to try to prevent another family from undergoing the intense grief we still are feeling.

I first contacted my state Legislator, Scott Petri, who immediately put me in contact with State Representative Katherine Watson. She heard my story and told me she would work on a house bill.

In front of me right now is a First Alert Carbon Monoxide detector. I purchased it for less than \$27.00. at Costco. In bold print on the front cover, these words state "Protect your family from the # 1 cause of accidental poisoning death in the United States. It's an invisible, tasteless odorless gas which can cause illness or death in as few as 15 minutes."

A carbon monoxide detector costs less than a double cheeseburger with French fries and a soda. It costs pennies, yet it can and does save lives. It is too late for Aunt Jean and Uncle Dave, but with our large and growing aging population in Pennsylvania, it is right, proper, and even our moral duty to become pro-active in safeguarding and protecting our mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters who may become victims to this insidious poison. This device which is very inexpensive can save a life.

I ask this panel, shouldn't this great Commonwealth of the State of Pennsylvania to a leader, be pro-active in saving lives?? And if not, I beg you, why not??

I urge you to vote this proposed House Bill 1952 out of committee unanimously in order to save the lives of faces whom we may or may not know.

Thank you for your attention in this matter.

Mary K. Amilton