The Honorable Virginia Lyons, Chair, Senate Committee on Health and Welfare
Members of the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare

RE: Support for S.154, an act relating to health insurance coverage for biomarker testing

Dear Chair Senator Lyons and Members of the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare:

I am Mary Claire Carroll, a resident of Richmond, and I am testifying in support of S.154, an act relating to health insurance coverage for biomarker testing.

My older sister was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in January 2020. As upsetting as the diagnosis was, what was more upsetting to her partner and I, was the length of time it took to receive a definitive diagnosis. My sister lived in New York City, she had great medical care from NYU Medical Center, 2 blocks from her home, but it took her partner and I a couple of years to convince her PCP that they should refer her to a Alzheimer's/ Dementia Specialist for assessment.

In her late 70's, my sister, a journalist, and a teacher, with a vibrant personality, had begun to show signs of confusion and memory loss. Her partner and I saw the changes, but my sister hid her decline so well no one but family members saw it. Because her primary doctor did not immediately notice the cognitive changes, he questioned our desire for some sort of cognitive assessment. Without the assessment my sister was not eligible for and could not access programs that might have helped her. And her partner could not access programs for respite care or support.

Finally, after nearly 2 years of her partner badgering her physicians, we had an appointment at the Barlow Center, NYU's Dementia and Alzheimer's Center. She was given some cognitive tests, and then scheduled for further testing. The early tests confirmed our fears that something was wrong. Almost immediately she was signed up for a program to help her learn coping and communication skills. She was also signed up for a physical therapy and exercise programs, and nutrition programs. Her partner suddenly had access to lots of information and support, including one on one counseling that he still uses today.

It is my understanding that biomarker tests could have made a huge difference for my sister. Had we been able to get a diagnosis in the early stages of her disease she might have gotten into programs testing new drug therapies. We all might have been able to get the support we needed to give her a better quality of life, and had more time with her at home. As it was, a broken hip put her in a nursing home in our home town in the Adirondacks within a year of diagnosis. She remains there instead of spending her last years with family.

As a two-time cancer survivor I understand fully the benefits of early diagnosis of any disease. Early diagnosis meant I was able to avoid chemo or radiation and recover quickly. It saved me money and provided a sure path for recovery.

As someone with a family history of Alzheimer's, it would be reassuring to know that I would have access to biomarker testing, like a simple blood test, that can diagnose the disease in its early stages. Then I could take advantage of new therapies and treatments, and maybe benefit from a cure for Alzheimer's. Please support this legislation so that all Vermonters can access this beneficial biomarker testing and benefit from an earlier diagnosis. And be able to access new disease-modifying treatments and care planning early enough to make a positive difference in their lives.

I respectfully ask for your support for S.154. Thank you for your time.

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