



Mr. President, I rise today to introduce legislation with my colleague from Wisconsin, Senator Baldwin, to reauthorize the Lifespan Respite Care Program.

Mr. President, every day, an estimated 53 million family caregivers attend to loved ones across all age groups, disabilities, and chronic conditions. Respite care gives these full-time caregivers a much-needed opportunity to take a temporary break from their important responsibilities. Caregivers help their loved ones remain at home, and the decision to assume these responsibilities full-time often delays the need for nursing home care. While many of these individuals care for an older adult, almost one third of caregivers attend to family members under the age of 50. The value of their efforts is tremendous, amounting to more than \$600 billion in uncompensated care each year.

This compassionate task, however, can take a tremendous toll. Caregivers experience higher mortality rates and are more likely to acquire acute and chronic health conditions themselves. Respite care helps reduce mental stress and physical health problems that they may experience, thus helping to keep caregivers healthy and families intact. Yet almost 85% of America's caregivers have never received any respite services. As a Senator representing the state with the oldest median age in the nation, the wellbeing of our older citizens and their caregivers is among my top priorities. Since the *Lifespan Respite Care Act* was enacted in 2006, 38 states and the District of Columbia have received grants to increase the availability and quality of respite services. Our legislation would extend this programming for another five years, through fiscal year 2030.

Mr. President, in Maine, there are approximately 166,000 family caregivers who provide 155 million hours of care to loved ones each year. The Maine Department of Health highlighted the importance of respite care in a report released earlier this year that evaluates the Maine state respite care program. Participants shared how assistance made available through this program has enabled them to take much needed breaks, reduce their anxiety, and even re-energize their enthusiasm for caregiving. One Mainer shared that access to respite care has meant that she has been able to truly visit with her parents when she spends time with them, instead of using all of that time just to do their chores, their yard work, and other tasks. She says that it has been wonderful to have someone help care for her parents with their chores and shopping for their needs, and it has meant that she herself is far less tired. Stories such as these emphasize the importance of respite care, of a break for these caregivers, who are giving so much to their family members.

Although most caregivers are adults, there are also more than 5 million young people in our country who provide care for grandparents, parents, or siblings with disabilities. Studies have found that approximately one in five young adults who dropped out of school did so to care for a family member. These children often choose to give up activities that other teens should enjoy, such as extracurricular activities, sports, outside activities, and they may experience depression or anxiety. Our legislation would clarify that young people who are caregivers, including those who are under age 18, are also able to access respite care services.

Mr. President, there is a large gap between caregivers who need respite services, who need a break from the 24-hour care of their loved ones, and those who actually receive this kind of assistance. Our bill would help close that gap by reauthorizing funding for this program that has helped states establish or strengthen respite services. This funding can be used to assist caregivers in finding available respite services, to train and recruit volunteers to provide temporary caregiving, and to provide financial support through vouchers so that caregivers can better afford respite services.

Our bill is widely supported by leading caregiver and respite organizations, including the ARCH National Respite Network and Resource Center, the Alzheimer's Association, and the Alzheimer's Impact Movement. Mr. President, our bipartisan legislation will provide the necessary resources to ensure that more caregivers have access to the respite services they need. I urge all of our colleagues to support this important bipartisan legislation. It will make a real difference for the family caregivers in our states.