

U.S. Senator Susan Collins
Statement: Lifespan Respite Reauthorization Act
February 24, 2020

Mr. President, I rise today to urge passage of bipartisan, compassionate legislation that I introduced on April 2nd of last year with my colleague from Wisconsin, Senator Baldwin, to reauthorize the Lifespan Respite Care program.

This program provides respite services to family members who are caring for loved ones with special needs. Often times they are taking care of a spouse with Alzheimer's disease or a child with several disabilities, and it is a 24/7 job. They need a break. They need help, and that's what respite service is all about.

Mr. President, this is not a new program. It has long been a bipartisan priority, and our bill is widely supported by a total of 100 leading caregiver and respite organizations across the country.

The Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee reported our bill unanimously on October 31st of last year, and we have been working since then to secure its passage by the full Senate. It cleared the Republican side of the aisle on December 17th, but the bill has been stalled on the other side of the aisle due to an unknown objection by an anonymous Senator, making it very difficult to resolve. If you don't know who has lodged the objection and you don't know what the concern is, it becomes impossible to resolve it. Thankfully, I'm pleased to report that the objection has now been lifted and we are poised to pass this bill that will help our hurt seniors caring for a spouse with Alzheimer's or another disease as well as parents caring for children with disabilities.

Mr. President, our bill would authorize \$10 million annually for the Lifespan Respite Care program over the next five years to assist states in establishing or enhancing statewide respite care programs. Since the program's enactment 15 years ago, 37 states, plus the District of Columbia, have received grants to increase the availability and quality of respite services. Failing to reauthorize this program would put this funding in jeopardy. While respite care is the number one service that caregivers say they need, 85 percent of our nation's caregivers have not received any respite services at all. Respite care has been shown to help sustain family caregiver health and well-being and avoid and delay out-of-home placement for those for whom they are caring.

From families caring with children with disabilities to those caring for older adults, the need for respite care today continues to grow. Our bipartisan legislation would help the 45 million caregivers in our country who provide an estimated \$470 billion in uncompensated care each year. As a Senator representing the state with the oldest median age in our nation, and as Chairman of the Senate Aging Committee, the well-being of our seniors and their caregivers is among my top priorities.

The need for respite care continues to outpace available resources. This program is an attempt to provide a modest amount of federal grant money toward this goal. Along with Senator Baldwin, this bipartisan bill is co-sponsored by Senators Murray, Reed, and Sinema.

More than 50 national stakeholders have signed a letter urging immediate passage of the bill, including the Arch National Respite Coalition, AARP, Easter Seals, the Arc, and the Elizabeth Dole Foundation. In addition, state-based organizations have also signed this letter representing constituents across the country. Mr. President, I would ask unanimous consent to include this letter in the record.

Mr. President, I have shared how important it is that we pass this legislation, the *Lifespan Respite Reauthorization Act of 2019*, without further delay, and I urge my colleagues to support the bill.

###