

Dear Members of the House Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Claudia Dunagan and I live in Cranston. I am writing to you about bill H6088, which allows a certified foot care nurse or a certified foot care specialist to provide certain at-home foot care, including routine foot and nail care, including nail clipping.

I support this bill because the availability of such services is a serious, unmet need of residents in the State of Rhode Island. I have personal experience with the issue, and I know that the need is urgent and must be redressed.

My mother moved to Rhode Island at the age of 95 in 2019. I was her caretaker for the following 4.5 years. As her health declined, she became increasingly homebound. Beginning in 2022, she received foot care at home until her certified Foot Care nurse was informed that she could not continue her practice, which left my mother and all other homebound Rhode Islanders without foot care unless they were able to get to a podiatrist's office.

I am going to begin with a description of my mother's last attempt to cut her toenails. By that time, my mother was 98 years old and diabetic. She was homebound and walked only a few feet a day with the support of her walker. I set her up in the usual way so that she could cut her nails — two stools, towels, clippers, cuticle scissors, and a pan of warm water to soak her feet and soften her nails. When I returned to the living room about 30 minutes later, the pan of water was blood red. When I poured the water out, at the bottom of the pan there were clots of blood the size of silver dollars. It was a horrible scene. As her caretaker, I was upset with myself that I had let this happen, but it also made clear that she no longer had the control to cut her nails without cutting her own flesh. I also knew that I was not qualified to care for such a vulnerable part of a diabetic's body, and I needed help.

I contacted Brown Gerontology, my mother's health care provider, to get a referral for someone who would come to our home. That's how I got in contact with Tina McDonald, a certified Foot Care nurse. Beginning in the summer of 2022, she would make visits to care for my mother's feet about every six weeks for the next year and several months. Tina was professional, highly skilled at what she did, and very kind in her interactions with my mother. My mother immediately loved this solution to her foot care needs. It was one area of my mother's care that I no longer had to worry about. The problem had been solved, until January of 2024.

In early January, 2024, Tina informed me that she had been notified she had to stop her Foot Care practice or she could possibly lose her nurse's license, something she couldn't risk. This was happening even though she had received the required training and certification to be a Foot Care Nurse, something that is recognized and practiced in every other state in the Union. I was left angry but also adrift. By that time, my mother was on home hospice care with Hope Health (an excellent non-profit agency for the elderly) and never left our home.

That was when I found out that absolutely no one in the state of Rhode Island, other than podiatrists in their offices, could perform foot care for my mother. NO ONE in the entire state! The Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA's) who came to our home to bathe and dress

my mother were not allowed to cut her nails. The registered hospice nurse from Hope Health who saw my mother every week could not. I briefly considered hiring a pedicurist to come to the house, but they don't know the medical side of diabetes and foot care. I knew less than any of the above. I was left with zero options.

My mother never received foot care again. She died on February 15, 2024, and the last image I have when they removed her body was her feet — with long, curling, twisted toe nails.

My question is this — Why? Why is certified health care for the homebound being denied in Rhode Island, when not one other state in the union is denying that service. Clearly the medical profession in the United States has recognized a need and training programs have been created that lead to certification as a Foot Care professional. How could it be that ONLY in Rhode Island we do NOT have nurses and professionals who could possibly be qualified to provide this service in the home. Why make the citizens of this state suffer when there are medically approved options to alleviate human suffering, especially at the end of life.

I believe it is the responsibility of every state representative in Rhode Island to guarantee that medically approved and certified health care options are available for the citizens of the state. Otherwise, in this case, you are casting a vote to increase human suffering for the elderly and their caretakers.

Finally, I want to include a description of Tina McDonald's level of care that I wrote when my mother was still alive and Tina's qualifications were being challenged. You need to know the level of care that is occurring in people's homes when a trained and certified Foot Care nurse comes in:

"I have nothing but good things to say about the professionalism, kindness, and quality of care that my mother has received from Tina. Being a caretaker of an elderly family member is filled with stress, and a huge amount of anxiety was lifted after Tina began. Tina spends approximately 30 to 40 minutes each visit. She clips my mother's nails, files and buffs them, applies lotions to her feet and legs, cleans up immaculately, and treats my mother with utmost kindness and respect. She is also qualified to take care of additional foot needs."

When I spoke with Tina about the bill, I asked her how many homebound people in Rhode Island had been affected. She informed me that she had a waiting list of over 350 residents. That's at least 350 Rhode Islanders who have not received the care they needed in well over a year, many of whom have probably died without receiving it. My mother was one of them.

Claudia Dunagan