

Testimony
Senate Finance Committee
Tuesday, March 8, 2016

Good afternoon Chairman Brandenburg and committee members. I am Ruth Linnemann, advocacy director of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society in Michigan. Thank you for the opportunity to share why SB395 is of great importance to people with MS.

MS is an unpredictable, often disabling disease of the central nervous system that disrupts the flow of information between the brain and body. While MS can affect most bodily functions and cognition, the movement impairments it inflicts can damage muscle strength and tone, balance, and coordination, plus cause pain and fatigue resulting in major limitations in all activities of daily living.

For individuals with MS, an accessible home with the necessary modifications can help them cope with many of their symptoms and maintain safety and independence. For example, installing grab bars or a step-in shower can help prevent falls. Appropriate modifications can mitigate balance limitations and adapt for gait and coordination issues to safely move from room to room. Installing a ramp means someone using a wheelchair or scooter can enter and exit their home, and make it possible for them to maintain employment, avoid isolation and engage in community activities.

Let me share a couple stories of real people:

Marcia, a Bloomfield home owner who uses adaptive equipment for most activities of daily living reports she had several falls, the most recent one resulting in a fractured knee and a subsequent stay in a hospital and nursing home for rehabilitation. She has already spent over \$5,000 in making home modifications.

Edward, a media specialist at Henry Ford College has fallen several times, breaking four ribs, twisting his knee and ankle and hitting his head on cement, which did not result a concussion that time but who know if that might occur next time. He needs a ramp to get in and out of his house more safely and a chair lift for the stairs to get to the second floor.

Studies report that over half of all people with MS fall in a six-month period and around 30 to 50% fall multiple times. Those falls result in injuries in over half of the cases. Falls lead to increased use and cost of healthcare services. Given the high prevalence and serious consequences of falls on people with MS, interventions including home modifications that prevent falls are essential.

Falls are an issue that impacts a much broader portion of the population. Based on facts published by the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services, falls were by far the leading cause of injury resulting in hospitalization in the older Michigan adult population; one in three adults (aged 65 or older) falls each year. Among older adults, falls are the leading cause of non-fatal and even fatal

injuries. In 2011, the Centers for Disease Control estimated almost 23,000 older adults in the US died from unintentional fall injuries. Many older people and people with disabilities who fall subsequently develop a fear of falling which causes them to curtail their activities. This likely leads to reduced fitness and mobility, thus increasing their risk of future falls. Making modification in one's own home can reduce the need to move to a nursing home at the current average cost of \$90,700 per year.

The average annual cost of living with MS is close to \$70,000 per year per person (including direct and in-direct costs). A tax credit could provide much needed financial relief for those individuals and families living with multiple sclerosis who struggle to manage the physical, emotional and financial costs of living with an incurable, degenerative disease and for seniors living on a fixed income.

We ask that you pass SB395 to make it possible for people with MS to live as safely and independently as possible as they strive to live their best lives now and in the years to come.

Thank you.