

**STATEMENT OF
SENATOR SUSAN COLLINS
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING HEARING
“AGING IN COMFORT: ASSESSING THE SPECIAL NEEDS OF
AMERICA’S HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS”
JANUARY 15, 2014**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for calling this hearing to focus on the unique health and social service needs of aging Holocaust survivors living in our country. These individuals often face significant challenges due to the physical and emotional brutality they experienced decades ago. These challenges can be exacerbated by the aging process, and caring for older Holocaust survivors requires a special sensitivity on the part of health care providers, social workers, caregivers and family members.

Of the estimated 500,000 Holocaust survivors, as many as 127,000 live in the United States. With an average age of 80, many are at the point in their lives when they may be coping with a serious or chronic illness or needing assistance with daily tasks. While the total survivor population may be decreasing, the number of survivors who will require services will continue to grow as they age.

Access to home care services is particularly important for Holocaust survivors because the emotional triggers that can be set off by institutional care may be devastating for them. Things that other residents would likely ignore can take aging Holocaust survivors psychologically and emotionally back to their traumatic youth or childhood. Confinement in an institutional setting with certain rules, schedules, and uniformed staff can bring back nightmares. Everyday experiences – showers, doctors, hunger, a lack of privacy – can trigger flashbacks and nightmares. It is no wonder that the focus of Jewish social services agencies is on keeping aging survivors in their home or in a familiar environment for as long as possible.

I have long been a strong proponent of home health care. Not only is it a more cost-effective alternative to institutional care, it also allows patients to stay just where they want to be, in the comfort, privacy and security of their own homes.

The bias toward institutional care in programs like Medicaid is particularly problematic for Holocaust survivors. While virtually every state has a Medicaid waiver to provide home and community-based care to individuals eligible for nursing home care, these programs are oversubscribed and there often are long waiting lists. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, more than 150,000 aged or disabled individuals are on waiting lists for home and community-based care nationwide. One of our witnesses this afternoon was initially told that her father would have to wait for at least three years to get the care that he needed in his home rather than in a nursing facility. That must change.

I look forward to exploring ways to ensure that Holocaust survivors, who have endured so much, get the support and the care that they need to live in their final years in dignity, comfort and security.