

## Statement of Maya Fischer: Daughter of Sonja Fischer, Nursing Home Rape Victim

Prepared for the Senate Finance Committee Hearing Not Forgotten: Protecting Americans From Abuse and Neglect in Nursing Homes, March 6, 2019

Chairman Grassley, Ranking Member Wyden, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to be here today on behalf of my mother, Sonja Fischer.

My mother, suffering from advanced Alzheimer's, was a Medicare patient at Walker Methodist Health Center in Minneapolis. On December 18, 2014, at 4 a.m., a nurse walked into her room and witnessed a male caregiver, George Kpingbah, raping my mother.

My mother had suffered from Alzheimer's for twelve years. She was totally immobile, unable to speak and was fully dependent on others for her care.

When I saw the nursing home's number on caller ID, I prepared myself for the worst, that my mother had passed away. I was not prepared for what I heard. A nurse informed me that my mother had been sexually assaulted and was being transported to the hospital. And just like that, my mother became another statistic in the shocking reality of nursing

home abuse. My mother was so much more than a statistic, so please allow me to tell you about her.

My mother was born in Jakarta, Indonesia in 1931. In 1942, the Japanese army invaded the Indonesian islands. In the horror of war, soldiers were raping and killing women and young girls. My grandparents were left with no option but to flee their homeland with their twelve-year-old daughter.

My mother ended up in the United States, became a US Citizen, and built a life for herself in this country. She was a testament to the American Dream. In this country, she was happy and safe—a world removed from the horrors of her youth. It was impossible to imagine that at the end of her life, when she had no ability to fend for herself, she would suffer the very same horror her parents had fled their home to protect her from.

At 83 years old, unable to speak, unable to fight back, she was more vulnerable than an infant when she was raped. The dignity which she always displayed during her life, which was already being assaulted by her disease, was dealt a further devastating blow by her caregiver.

I received the phone call that this unthinkable act had been committed against my mother during the week of Christmas in 2014. This news was devastating not only for its immediate shock but how it has affected the memories we had of my mother and Christmases past. Now and for the rest of my life, when I think of my mother at Christmas, I think of the horrifying shock of that call.

The sense of helplessness I felt, trying to comfort her while she had a rape kit performed will remain with me always. As will the nine hours I spent in the emergency room with her and the fear she must have felt with the bright lights and the scary noises of monitors going off. I will remember the pain she went through having an IV drip to make sure that at 83 she didn't contract a sexually transmitted disease.

My final memories of my mother's life now include watching her bang uncontrollably on her private parts for days after the rape, with tears rolling down her eyes, apparently trying to tell me what had been done to her, but unable to speak. I still feel the guilt of not being able to take care of her myself and having to entrust her care to others only to have her subjected to this unthinkable assault.

I remember the difficult decision we had to make when we realized that we could no longer care for her at home. We understood this meant we had to select a nursing home. We did everything we could to find the best place for her.

We assured my mother that she would be safe: she would not suffer. I can never overcome the guilt of realizing that these promises were not kept: She was not safe, she was raped.

Could this rape been prevented? It is my understanding that other residents had previously complained of sexual misconduct while Mr. Kpingbah worked there. I have learned that the Department of Health investigated these prior complaints, did nothing, and then kept them hidden. I can't help but wonder how my mom's, my family's, and my life would have been different had the Department not kept these allegations hidden.

Families struggling to care for their loved ones, do everything they can to find the best possible care. To make the best decision possible, we rely on the information provided by the Department of Health. We must have access to all important information to help us make these difficult decisions.

Please consider what I have shared with you today, how this crime has changed our lives forever, how it stole away the last shred of my mother's dignity and tarnished the memory of a decent and loving woman who had already suffered enough.

Thank you for allowing me to tell my mother's story.