

ORAL TESTIMONY SUBMITTED BY ANAT BAR-COHEN to the

SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING: Aging in Comfort: Assessing the Special Needs of America's Holocaust Survivors, January 15, 2014

Good afternoon. My name is Anat Bar-Cohen. I am the daughter of two survivors of the Holocaust, Jack Pavony and Barbara Borer Pavony. Both endured several ghettos and concentration camps and the infamous death march. I was born in a Displaced Person's camp in Turchem, Germany where my parents met after the war. Motivated by this background, I am also the co-president of the Generation After, Inc. the Washington Metropolitan organization of descendants of the Holocaust, and a founding Coordinating Council member of Generations of the Shoah, International.

I am pleased to be called to testify at these hearings both on behalf of my own family who witnessed and endured many of the agonies and barriers to care that you heard in Mr. Rubin's testimony, but also to represent the voices of the second and third generations. The families who have lived with the impact of the physical and emotional health needs of our survivor parents and grandparents all these years are now watching and coping with the much more exacerbated needs that have emerged as survivors age and their horrific histories come back to plague them once again.

Senator Nelson, Ranking Member Senator Collins, and committee members, I, too, want to thank you for convening this very significant hearing. It has been a long time hope of our community that these hearings would be held and a spotlight shone on the unique unmet needs of this increasingly fragile group of America's aging community – America's Holocaust survivors.

My father was plunged into the nightmare of Auschwitz in 1942 at the age of 16. After surviving unspeakable events for over 3 years and the Death March, he was freed from Ebensee camp in 1945 by the liberating forces of the United States of America. At age 19 he joined an American Army camp in Germany as a worker to "give back" and, as a gesture of what became a lifelong sense of gratitude, requested to join the American Army and fight in Japan. He received a letter from President Truman thanking him for his courage but telling him he had suffered enough in his young life and encouraging him to pick up the pieces and create a productive life. He followed President Truman's words to the end of his days and truly succeeded.

He worked hard, created his own business, as a proud American voter and taxpayer, a loving father, husband, grandfather and great grandfather. His wife, my mother and a survivor of Auschwitz from Warsaw, died at age 32 of Hotchkins disease. The tragedies for our family did not end in 1945. At age 80, in declining health with Parkinson's disease, congestive heart failure and kidney disease, he moved as a widower to be with us in the Washington DC area. After he had a bad fall in our multi-level home, we moved to Maryland to a home that would provide a safer environment, but by then his needs had increased, and he moved to an assisted

living arrangement. After other falls, it was clear he needed more full time assistance – although his social involvement, reading the Washington Post every day, eating dinner with other Survivors, participating in holiday, family community events did not mark him as a nursing home candidate. Even after moving again to a HUD subsidized apartment, his expenses for rent and full time aide were \$7,834 a month and his income from social security and German reparations were \$1,753 a month. Despite the family paying for part of the home health care, transportation, food, clothing, health insurance and all other expenses, it was becoming impossible to sustain him in his own home or ours.

Resurrecting his life out of the ashes, alone, and with an eighth grade education, my father, was nevertheless able to amass savings he thought would last a lifetime. After just 3 years, he was on the brink of destitution and facing an unwarranted life in a nursing home – something that was unthinkable to him and to us as his family. As would be true for most Holocaust survivors, being in an institution with its external regimen imposed by uniformed strangers, its sudden loud noises, bright lights, and the loss of personal control would have surely triggered for my father extreme anxiety and helplessness - and the terror of being once more imprisoned.

Over the past several years, we have learned more and more about the effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) sadly from returning soldiers and victims of atrocities. We understand the unique and frightful ramifications of untreated PTSD with its depression and increased suicide rates and as a result a portfolio of physical, mental, medical and rehabilitative treatments are becoming available to treat these symptoms. For this unique community of elderly Holocaust survivors who as young people, sometimes as children, witnessed massacres, their own parents and family killed in front of them, and other atrocities, this portfolio of care was not available in their earlier years but is required by many today. Nightmares, which were common for survivors when they were younger, have begun to return as they age and particularly when they are in unfamiliar settings. We, their children, feel helpless to stop this repeat of their past pain and anguish. A loss of control is painful to anyone but for survivors, who have lost every human right and all their freedoms, the threat can be agonizingly traumatic and they hold on to their independence to the end. When short-term memory fails, they return not to the usual mix of childhood memories, but to the horrors of their youth – again doomed to relive the deprivation and losses of the past. And when the English language learned later in life starts retreating, they revert to their mother tongues, making it difficult for health providers to communicate and help them, throwing them further into isolation. All special considerations for the care they must receive and the home health care they need.

Our family explored every avenue to keep my father in his home or ours as his assets disappeared. We turned to every agency in the community for assistance – the county, state, the Jewish Family Services with its special survivor services funded by the Claims Conference. My father received assistance for a hearing aide, metro access cards for dialysis trips, a friendly visitor once a week, but that was all.

When he moved with us to Maryland we had registered him for the Maryland Medicaid waiver to provide home health care support to keep him at home. Years prior, he had tried to apply for long-term health insurance, but because of his precarious health status – some of which had its genesis during his beatings and starvation in Auschwitz, he was denied. This is a common situation for survivors who bear lifelong marks of their fragile health as a result of the Holocaust. In April 2009, my father was number 9730 on that Medicaid waiver list with 3 to 4 year wait. In desperation, I turned to my senator, Senator Mikulski in a letter detailing his plight as a Holocaust survivor and asking for her advice. We did receive a hopeful message from the Maryland Office of Health and Human Services in response on June 24, 2009, but alas, my father had passed away on June 6, 2009 – 4 days shy of his 83rd birthday.

Although these hearings and their outcome can no longer serve my father or our family, I hope that his story and his memory will help the remaining thousands of survivors, nearly half of whom live below or near poverty in the United States alone, whose plight grows more desperate by the day. In my own community here in the Washington DC area, the Jewish Social Service Agency JSSA has experienced a 15% budget cut for each of the past 4 years from the Claims Conference and other sources while at the same time experiencing an increase in survivor clients, many of whom are in need of increasingly more complex and expensive assistance. This decline in funding will continue and agencies around the country are being told to find matching funds or find other means to cover the shortfall. This has led to across the board cuts to vital services, placing fragile and impoverished survivors on waiting lists, eliminating social events, transportation and other crucial services. Washington JSSA had projected a shortfall for designated Holocaust survivor services of \$730,000 for 2013 and similar or greater shortfalls for the next 10 years.

In response, groups and generous individuals in the Jewish community have made desperate attempts to fill the gaps. A community Survivor Initiative has over the past 2 years succeeded in raising \$1.9 million dollars. Even the third generation, grandchildren of survivors, have held several happy hours and evenings with survivors to raise funds. This is both heartwarming and helpful. But can we be satisfied that sporadic private fundraising and grandchildren led happy hour events can ever constitute the systematic approach to caring for the nation's aging survivors for their final years? Is it not our obligation to assure that there is a well-designed plan in place to provide comprehensive, ongoing and affordable care in a dignified manner to meet the special needs of this community? With these generous funds, JSSA was able to restore the cuts to services and now provides 25 hours a week of home care to a survivor living in poverty. That is roughly 4 days a month. For someone needing full time care or even part time care. how can this be the best we can do for them?

As families of survivors and American citizens and taxpayers, we call for improved services for the entire elderly community including the survivors. Helping the elderly age at home with help from long-term health care services is crucial. As with

the humane approach of the Affordable Care Act, these services need to be available regardless of preexisting conditions. Given the economics of home health care versus institutional nursing care, we must make it possible for survivors with these truly unique needs to afford home health care which will also save the system millions of dollars.

Five years have passed since my father's hour of need. Nevertheless, it is gratifying to see that just this past Friday, January 10, 2014 CMS has issued its final rules on home and community –based services providing states with the option to combine multiple target populations into one waiver to facilitate streamlined administration of HCBS waivers, assist the individual in achieving personally defined outcomes in the most integrated community setting, ensure delivery of services in a manner that reflects personal preferences and choices, and contributes to the assurance of health and welfare. The White House, too, has announced that it will appoint a special envoy to assist Holocaust survivors who are living in poverty with a number of helpful services. All of this is headed in the right direction, but we must remember, that the survivors cannot wait, services cannot be dependent on fine intentions or yearly negotiations that never live up to the needs of this community.

We in the survivor community also remember the promise made by Chancellor Adenaur that Germany would provide for the victims of the Holocaust “to their last breath” and know that the current state of affairs would have caused him anguish. Germany bears the primary responsibility for the welfare of the survivors and nothing less than making good on that promise will suffice. We turn to the American government to make every effort to assure that Germany provides the care that survivors need and that they do it now – in the last hours of this community's life. The additional funds that have been promised in Germany's latest proposal are, as Jack Rubin so eloquently stated, completely inadequate. Funds must also be forthcoming from the insurance companies that still hold the pre-war claims of our families – companies such as Allianz and Generali that make enormous profits in the United States, have an obligation to contribute to the welfare of Survivors.

Thank you for listening to my father's story, which is the story of so many of our parents. Thank you for this opportunity to voice the concerns of second and third generation children and grandchildren of survivors on behalf of the needs of our Holocaust survivor parents. As advocates for our parents, we are ready to take our seats at the table in all decision making that goes on around survivor needs.

I know what my sisters and brothers are going through today as they struggle to shield their frail parents from these harsh realities. Even as small children, we knew that this would be our lifelong sacred task... silently we each pledged to protect them from further pain and misery. Now we often feel powerless to change the system that seems to have forgotten them – again. Please listen to the authentic and legitimate voices of those who truly know about the unmet needs of America's Holocaust survivors.

This is a defining and finite moment in history when Congress can act to do the right thing. In ten short years, that moment will be forever gone. These wonderful people believed in the power to resurrect extraordinary lives, contributed to this country, with appreciation and through the strength of their will to survive.

In the memory of my parents, Jack and Barbara Pavony, and in honor of all those survivors still with us, I say to you, "Do not fail them now."

Sincerely,

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