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December 12, 2013

The Honorable Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator
302 Hart Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
United States Senator
503 Hart Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Klobuchar and Senator Mikulski:

On behalf of the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association (AHA/ASA) and our more than 22.5 million volunteers and supporters, we write to thank you for your commitment to family caregivers by introducing the Americans Giving Care to Elders (AGE) Act (S. 1485). We believe that this legislation is an important step forward in ensuring that family caregivers receive the financial and educational assistance they need to best care for and support stroke survivors.

As you may know, nearly half of Medicare beneficiaries discharged from the hospital after a stroke return directly home, often with the help and support of a spouse or other family caregiver. Without this critical assistance from family members – like help with bathing, feeding, housekeeping, and medication adherence – stroke survivors would likely be unable to remain at home but would instead be in a nursing home or hospital.

While being a family caregiver of a stroke survivor is often rewarding, it can also cause physical, emotional, and financial distress to the caregiver. In fact, a 2005 survey conducted by the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association found that nearly 43 percent of stroke caregivers said being a caregiver had affected them financially “quite a bit” or “a lot,” and a past study conservatively estimated that informal caregivers provide approximately \$6.1 billion annually in informal care to stroke survivors. Additional research has also shown that family caregivers spend an average of about \$5,500 out-of-pocket annually. In some cases, caregiving may even require family members to use their savings or cut back on spending for their own health care needs.

We are encouraged that the AGE Act seeks to address the financial burden of family caregiving by establishing a federal tax credit of up to \$1,200 a year to assist with the costs of caring for an elderly family member. We would like to work with you to expand this tax credit to help families caring for non-elderly relatives. About one-quarter of all stroke survivors are under age 65, and they and their families could also benefit greatly from such a credit. But meanwhile, your bill would provide a measure of much-needed financial relief to many stroke survivors and their families.

We are also pleased that your bill would increase existing federal resources that support family caregivers and create a new National Resource Center of Family Caregiving that would provide information to caregivers on family caregiver support programs and would disseminate best practices for caring for a family member.

We thank you again for your leadership and commitment to our family caregivers. While we know that more can be done to provide support and financial assistance for caregivers, this legislation is a step in the right direction to help stroke survivors receive the care they need to remain in their homes and with their loved ones.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nancy A. Brown". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Nancy A. Brown
CEO