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EVEN THE BRIGHTEST MINDS CAN SUFFER FROM DEMENTIA

Recently, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, the first woman appointed to the United States Supreme Court, wrote a letter addressed to "Friends and fellow Americans" discussing her diagnosis with the beginning stages of dementia. In her letter, Justice O'Connor explained that her condition is "probably Alzheimer's disease."

Justice O'Connor, age 88, was appointed to the Supreme Court by President Ronald Reagan in 1981. Since retiring from the Supreme Court in 2006, Justice O'Conner has continued to demonstrate her commitment to public service. In 2010, Justice O'Conner began the iCivics program, which she describes as an educational program designed "to teach the core principles of civics to middle and high school students with free online interactive games and curriculum that make learning relevant and remarkably effective." As explained in her recent letter, Justice O'Connor believes her diagnosis means she can no longer help to lead this cause, but she believes the program will continue to flourish under new leadership. More information on the iCivics program can be found at www.icivics.org.

The sad news regarding Justice O'Connor's diagnosis reminds us that even the brightest minds are not immune to the devastating impacts of Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. Justice O'Connor's letter might also serve as inspiration for those who suffer from dementia or who have family members or other loved ones who suffer from such conditions. You can find the full letter here.

It is important to acknowledge the significant impacts that this tragic disease can have on families and on our society as a whole. As our nation's baby boomers continue to age, the number of people impacted by dementia will likely increase significantly. According to the Alzheimer's Association, there are currently about 5.7 million people suffering from Alzheimer's disease in the United States, and that number is expected to double by 2050.

We would do well to heed one of the statements that Justice O'Connor made in her letter: "It's not enough to understand [the effects of dementia], you've got to do something." At O'Neil Cannon, we remain committed to helping to protect the legacies of those who suffer from this disease. Unfortunately, there are times when a family member or other acquaintance might attempt to take advantage of a person suffering from dementia by exerting undue influence to gain a financial benefit. These attempts to take advantage might

involve unauthorized transfers or withdrawals of money from an elderly person’s accounts, or improperly seeking to elicit changes to a will, trust, or other legal document. While many people diagnosed with dementia remain capable of changing their estate plans for some period of time after they are diagnosed, if such changes are the result of undue influence, then those who are impacted may have the right to pursue relief in court.

If you would like to further discuss this article, please feel free to contact Attorney Trevor Lippman at 414-276-5000 or Trevor.Lippman@wilaw.com.