Testimony of Evan Smith, Friendship Heights Neighbors Network, in Support of House Bill 498 at House Hearing on February 11, 2020

I am Evan Smith, Vice President of the Friendship Heights Neighbors Network, a Village that serves the Friendship Heights neighborhood in Chevy Chase, Maryland.

I am here to urge your support of HB 498, the Bill that directs funding for aging-in-place programs, including a set-aside for Senior Villages. The Bill is the funding arm of the Nonprofits for our Aging Neighbors Act and we believe it should receive the same overwhelming legislative support that NANA received last year.

As you may know, Villages are part of a national movement aimed at helping older adults age-in-place through the help of their neighbors as volunteers. There are more than 40 currently operating in Maryland.

Most people want to remain in their homes as they age. Given the high cost of paid healthcare and related services, often provided under government programs, Villages offer the most cost-effective way to meet many of the needs of our aging population. More importantly, Villages reduce the social isolation so detrimental to the health of seniors and help them thrive as they meet the challenges of the aging process. They build community, as neighbors learn to trust and befriend one another.

Our Village was formed in 2016 and meets the Bill's definition of a Senior Village. We have over 85 members and are proud of our record of service to them, with annual attendance of over 1,000 at our social and educational events and over 3,500 hours of volunteer service.

But there are dollar costs for running a Village — insurance, training, background checks and much more. These costs are only partially offset by dues and donations. Passage of the Bill would be a great help in sustaining and expanding our efforts. It would show a commitment by Maryland to the work of Villages to create caring communities in which seniors can independently and comfortably age-in-place.

Please support HB 498. Thank you for your consideration and representation.