

Testimony in Support of SB 725 - Public Health Outreach Programs-
Cognitive Impairment, Alzheimer's Disease
and Other Types of Dementia
Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs
March 12, 2020

The Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) is a voluntary, non-profit citizens' organization concerned with all aspects of behavioral health. MHAMD's Coalition on Mental Health and Aging is comprised of representatives from aging, mental health, consumer, family and professional associations and government agencies working together to improve the quality and accessibility of behavioral health assessment, treatment, recovery and illness prevention services for older Marylanders. We have always considered dementia within our purview because of the high rates of behavioral and psychiatric symptoms experienced by individuals afflicted by Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. In addition, we count the Alzheimer's Association Maryland Chapter among our valued members. We appreciate the opportunity to offer support of SB 725.

It is absolutely essential that Maryland acknowledges the fact that dementia is a growing public health crisis requiring full attention and appropriate resourcing from the Maryland Department of Health. Whether the cause of dementia is Alzheimer's disease, Stroke, Parkinson's disease, Multiple Sclerosis, the effects of delirium or another cause, Maryland citizens and their care partners suffer immeasurably. Both the public and health care providers must be informed of symptoms, early detection, diagnostic options and resources for support.

Can you imagine the accusations of negligence that would be heaped upon the Governor, state agencies and the Maryland legislature if there was no coordinated response or specific outreach campaign for a virus that was afflicting 110,000 Marylanders, having claimed 1,200 lives in 2019 and costing Medicaid 1.16 billion dollars annually? This is practically where we stand with regards to Maryland's poor response to Alzheimer's disease and related dementia. That this health crisis is projected to grow by 18% in the next five years **demands** top prioritization for public education and resource information across the state.

SB 725 simply requires that the Department of Health, in partnership with the Department of Aging, the Virginia I Jones Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Council and the Alzheimer's Association incorporate information into health outreach programs administered by MDH to:

- **Increase community awareness and understanding** of Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia, the value of early detection and diagnosis and ways to reduce the risk of cognitive decline especially among individuals in diverse communities who are at greatest risk for developing dementia.
- **Educate health care providers** regarding the importance of early detection and timely diagnosis of cognitive impairment as well as information on validated assessment tools and reimbursement methods.

This is the least that MDH should be doing to address the epidemic rates of dementia. Education and training of health and human service workers should also be required and MDH should be implementing the recommendations of the Alzheimer's disease and Related Disorders Commission but, first things first! Let's get this bill passed that will harness the momentum of the Alzheimer's Association, the expertise of the Virginia I. Jones Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Council and the information networks of the MDH and Department of Aging. Our coalition's network is eager to help as well.

The Maryland Coalition strongly urges a favorable report on SB725.