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Suburban Orthodox Congregation  
Temple Beth Shalom  
Temple Isaiah  
Winands Road Synagogue Center  
Zionist Organization of America  
Baltimore District



## WRITTEN TESTIMONY

### Senate Bill 966 - Health Facilities - Assisted Living Programs - Referrals and Licenses

Finance Committee  
March 5, 2020

## SUPPORT

**Background:** Senate Bill 966 would make it a civil offense for a person to knowingly or willfully refer a client to an unlicensed assisted living facility. It would necessitate more transparency by referral agencies by requiring them to register with the state and disclose financial relationships with assisted living facilities. It would also give the Attorney General the authority to shut down unlicensed assisted living facilities in certain cases and investigate referral agency violations.

**Written Comments:** Every senior deserves to live in a safe place, however, right now in Maryland, we know that is not the case. Far too many seniors have been placed by referral agencies in or discharged to substandard unlicensed assisted living facilities, often without knowing the facility was unlicensed. With the continual advancements in medicine, the senior population will keep growing, and this will become an unfortunate reality for more and more Marylanders. By 2030 Maryland's 60+ population is projected to reach 1.7 million people, requiring more and more resources.

Several Associated agencies, including, Jewish Community Services (JCS), Comprehensive Housing Assistance Inc. (CHAI), and CHANA provide services to the rapidly aging Baltimore Community. CHANA has seen an uptick in clients who have been unknowingly discharged to unlicensed assisted living facilities and the abuse that they endured and the inability for OHCQ to intervene. (See attached client story below).

We urge the committee to take action and to support SB966 in order to make Maryland safer for older adults, shut down unlicensed assisted living facilities and stop allowing referral agencies to refer clients to unlicensed facilities.

*The Baltimore Jewish Council, a coalition of central Maryland Jewish organizations and congregations, advocates at all levels of government, on a variety of social welfare, economic and religious concerns, to protect and promote the interests of The Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, its agencies and the Greater Baltimore Jewish community.*

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## SAFE: Stop Abuse of Elders, a program of CHANA- Client Story

In 2018, we received a call from a 65-year-old woman named Delores who was living in a filthy, bug-infested unlicensed assisted living facility in Baltimore County. She had moved there nine months earlier after a hospitalization; she could not return to her prior home because her previous landlady had moved to a nursing home. The hospital had connected her with Golden Arms, a placement agency. Golden Arms found her a room in what they called a licensed care home, but it was not licensed at all. The manager of this dilapidated house left residents alone for most of the day with no care while she went to her job in a restaurant and did not feed the residents breakfast until mid-afternoon. The manager screamed at Delores and punished her for complaining by refusing to feed her for days on end. The condition of the home was dangerous – exits were blocked with stacks of boxes, electric sockets were burned out, and one day the ceiling above Delores' bed collapsed shortly after she had awoken, leaving plaster and debris on all her furnishings and possessions.

Delores had suffered physically and emotionally throughout her life. She is a domestic violence survivor and had several difficult health conditions that were further exacerbated by her home environment and her difficulties getting to the doctor and paying for her medications.

Our attempts to help Delores find suitable housing met many barriers. It was unsafe for us to visit Delores in the home because she feared repercussions from the manager. Adult Protection Services had originally refused her case when she called on her own because they felt she did not qualify as a vulnerable adult. At SAFE we contacted the Long-Term Care Ombudsman who could not visit because the facility is unlicensed. We made three separate reports to the Office of Health Care Quality (OHCQ), because we were concerned not only for Delores but for the other two residents in the home. OHCQ sent inspectors out but could not get into the home because the manager had trained the residents not to open the door when she was out of the house. The OHCQ inspector said she was not authorized to bring a police officer with her to gain entry.

We began to meet with Delores in safe places – the doctor's office, a local Burger King. We helped her to apply for safe housing. She was often ravenously hungry when we met because of the irregular meals she was fed and so we bought her meals. In between visits with us, when Delores was denied meals, she called us. We paid for meals to be delivered to her and we timed the deliveries so they would arrive when the manager was away.

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Because Delores' income was very low, her housing options were limited, and the senior apartments she could afford had long wait lists. About a year after we had started to work with her, we made another APS referral, which this time was accepted, and we worked with the APS investigator on housing. After Delores was hospitalized for an emergency medical issue, the APS worker arranged for her to move into a licensed assisted living facility and the agency paid her first month's rent. Unfortunately, this facility did not meet her needs and Delores was ready to leave there and be homeless when SAFE offered her temporary shelter in our community-based safehouse.

Once she settled into the safehouse, we realized that many of her belongings and much of her identification was at the previous unlicensed Assisted Living Facility, and we were not able to help her retrieve them all. We began the long process of helping her replace her basic identity documents such as her social security card, veteran's identification as well as an out-of-state marriage certificate needed to prove her married name so she could get a state ID card. We helped her get to medical appointments and to complete dozens of housing applications.

We are happy to say that, after seven months in the safehouse, Delores moved into her own apartment in Baltimore a month ago and is doing well. For every Delores that we are able to help, there are hundreds more who are victimized by abusive owners of unlicensed facilities that we do not know about. This system is aided and abetted by unscrupulous and unregulated placement agencies. This must stop. All older adults deserve to live in safety, cleanliness, comfort, dignity and peace.