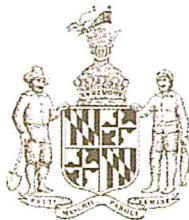


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Judicial Proceedings Committee

Parliamentarian
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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony by Senator Charles E. Sydnor III
Regarding SB 153
Criminal Law – Abuse or Neglect of a Vulnerable Adult – Causing Severe Emotional Distress
Before the Judicial Proceedings Committee
January 22, 2020**

Good afternoon Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee.

Our most vulnerable citizens deserve to live a life of dignity, free from the well-documented negative effects on physical and mental health that are related to living with humiliation, threats, and harassment from those we trust to care for them. According to the American Psychological Association, of the millions of elderly and other vulnerable adults who are abused each year, about 95 percent of them also experience some form of emotional abuse. Emotional abuse has been linked to isolation, early death, severe depression and the destruction of brain cells and neural connections. This is particularly damaging to older adults or those who are already neurologically diminished. Maryland law rightly protects children from emotional and mental injury. There are, however, no criminal penalties (see §§ 3-601 and 602 of the Criminal Code) that protect vulnerable adults from this type of abuse. This is true despite the fact that most non-profits and state agencies serving the elderly and disabled recognize and describe emotional abuse among this population. These agencies, including the Maryland and Federal Adult Protective Services, the Maryland Courts, Anne Arundel County, Montgomery County, Baltimore City and the Maryland State 2-1-1 website all encourage citizens to report abuse. Currently, there is nothing that can be done to respond to even the most heinous of these reports.

It is time for Maryland to join states like Alabama, Hawaii, South Dakota, South Carolina and Utah in making the quality of life of our vulnerable adult citizens a priority. I hope that passage of SB 153 will be a significant step towards that goal. I ask that we move favorably on SB 153.