alzheimer's association

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Testimony of the Alzheimer's Association Greater Maryland and National Capital Area Chapters
SB 384 - Health Facilities - Residential Service Agencies - Compliance with State Labor Laws
Position: Favorable

Chairwoman Kelley and Vice Chair Feldman,
My name is Eric Colchamiro, and I am the Director of Government Affairs for the Alzheimer's Association in Maryland. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 384, legislation which requires the Office of the Attorney General, in consultation with the Maryland Department of Health and the Maryland Department of Labor, to produce a guidance document, by December 30, 2021, concerning the application of employee protection laws to personal care aides employed by residential service agencies.

The Alzheimer's Association is tremendously concerned with the state of our direct care workforce, including the staff employed by Maryland's residential service agencies. For our patient population, individuals managing dementia—95 percent of them have at least one other chronic condition—care is complicated. Along with the importance of being adequately trained in dementia, we are concerned about the high turnover, low pay, and few opportunities for advancement which make filing direct care positions difficult. By 2030, 3.4 million more direct care workers will be needed — a 48% increase from 2015.

I am pleased that the four percent Medicaid reimbursement rate will fortify this group of providers, who have not gotten the COVID-19 related aid they need. Yet we must also take steps to protect this Maryland workforce; nearly one-third of whom are from outside the United States, and nearly 50 percent of whom have not completed education beyond high school.

We urge a favorable report for this bill, as it informs providers about appropriately managing their workforce, and so the 'bad apples' in this industry do not misclassify staff as independent contractors (where they can be paid lower wages and have limited job protections). We urge a favorable report on this bill because it further engages the State of Maryland in improving the work conditions for this essential workforce. And we urge a favorable report because it helps us collect accurate data on the wages of this workforce, and my goodness, set a better system in place for these providers and a workforce essential to Marylanders with dementia before, during, and after the pandemic.

Thank you for your time.