



Ashley Black, Staff Attorney
Public Justice Center
201 North Charles Street, Suite 1200
Baltimore, Maryland 21201
410-625-9409, ext. 224
blacka@publicjustice.org

HB 806

Health programs – Nursing Homes and Assisted Living Programs – Essential Caregivers

Hearing of the House Health and Government Operations Committee

February 18, 2021

1:30 PM

SUPPORT

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a not-for-profit civil rights and anti-poverty legal services organization which seeks to advance social justice, economic and racial equity, and fundamental human rights in Maryland. Our Health Rights Project supports policies and practices that promote the overall health of Marylanders struggling to make ends meet, with the explicit goal of promoting strategies that work to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in health outcomes. PJC **strongly supports HB 806**, which would require Maryland nursing homes and assisted living programs (ALPs) to establish policies and procedures authorizing indoor visitation from individuals designated as “essential caregivers.”

Maryland’s nursing homes and ALPs provide care to a variety of populations, but most residents are individuals with disabilities. About 6 of 10 nursing home residents in Maryland have moderate to severe cognitive and physical impairments.¹ Similarly, over half of Maryland’s ALP residents have Alzheimer’s disease or another form of dementia.² In March 2020, nursing homes and ALPs were subjected to strict lockdowns on visitation to prevent residents who are at an elevated risk for severe COVID-19 complications from contracting the virus. Almost one year later, visitation is still restricted. Isolation can have a negative impact on the mental and physical wellbeing of a resident. There have been stories across the country of nursing home and ALP residents suffering significant cognitive and physical decline as a result of lockdowns. Maryland needs to find the balance between preventing the spread of COVID-19 in these settings and ensuring that residents receive the emotional and social support that they need. HB 806 strikes that balance by allowing Maryland’s nursing homes and ALPs to set their own policies and procedures for allowing residents to receive visits from one essential caregiver, an individual deemed critical to the resident’s emotional

¹ Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, *Nursing Home Data Compendium* (2015), https://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Provider-Enrollment-and-Certification/CertificationandCompliance/downloads/nursinghomedatacompendium_508-2015.pdf.

² National Center for Assisted Living, *Maryland Profile for Assisted Living*, <https://www.ahcancal.org/Assisted-Living/Facts-and-Figures/Documents/State%20Facts/Maryland-AL.pdf> (last visited on February 15, 2021).

wellbeing and daily care. If passed, HB 806 would help improve health outcomes for residents who need the type of care and social support that can only be provided by their essential caregiver.

For these reasons, the Public Justice Center urges the committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report for **HB 806**. If you have any questions, please contact Ashley Black at 410-625-9409 x 224 or blacka@publicjustice.org.