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TO: Budget and Taxation Committee
FROM: LeadingAge Maryland
SUBJECT: Senate Bill 636, Maryland Department of Health - Waiver Programs - Waitlist Reduction (End the Wait Act)
DATE: March 2, 2022
POSITION: **Favorable**

LeadingAge Maryland supports Senate Bill 636, Maryland Department of Health - Waiver Programs - Waitlist Reduction (End the Wait Act).

LeadingAge Maryland is a community of more than 135 not-for-profit aging services organizations serving residents and clients through continuing care retirement communities, affordable senior housing, assisted living, nursing homes and home and community-based services. Our mission is to expand the world of possibilities for aging in Maryland. We partner with consumers, caregivers, researchers, public agencies, faith communities and others who care about aging in Maryland.

This legislation requires the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) to develop a plan to reduce the waitlists for several waiver programs by 50%, including the home and community based option waiver, beginning in fiscal year 2024. The MDH plan must address measures to recruit and retain providers for each waiver program, any changes in reimbursement rates for services provided under the waiver programs, the expected time frame for reducing the waitlist for each waiver program by 50% and the projected cost of the measures to be implemented under the plan. Beginning in fiscal year 2024, the Governor must include in the annual budget bill sufficient funds to carry out this section.

For some time, LeadingAge Maryland has urged expanded access to the Home and Community-Based Waiver which provides community services and supports to enable older adults and people with disabilities to live in their own homes. Maryland residents age 18 and over who need assistance with activities of daily living, such as bathing, grooming, dressing and mobility can apply.

There are both financial and health benefits of receiving care in the community. In fact, a 2013 study examined the impacts the length of home and community-based services wait lists on a variety of factors. The study notes that older applicants in general were disproportionately impacted by longer wait list times, and that “those with short wait times (versus long) had a 48 percent lower risk of having a long-term nursing home stay in the three years after application and had lower average Medicaid spending on long-term stays of \$111 per person per month”. (2013, [ASPE](#)). According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, in the US, individuals on these wait lists wait an average of 30 months before gaining access to services and supports, although there is significant variation based on the type of care or support an individual is seeking – some waiting more than 66 months (2019, [Kaiser Family Foundation](#)).

The Maryland Medicaid Home and Community Based Services Options Waiver (HCBOW) program can provide the needed services to Marylanders with disabilities at home. Maryland has permission from the federal government to grant 6,348 waivers for home and community-based services, but it only enrolls 4,286 residents. More than 25,000 residents sit on wait lists to be approved. In 2019, HCBOW served less than 5,700 individuals. When the MDH readjusts HCBOW program availability every few years, it does not count eligible people on the 8-year, 25,000-person waiting list. As long as Marylanders are unable to live at home and bypass the lengthy waiting list, their only option is entering a nursing home. This is costly and unnecessary. Senate Bill 636 ensures that the State is proactively addressing the significant needs of individuals on the waitlist.

For these reasons, LeadingAge Maryland respectfully requests a favorable report for Senate Bill 636.

For additional information, please contact Aaron J. Greenfield, 410.446.1992