

Testimony of the Alzheimer's Association Greater Maryland and National Capital Area Chapters  
**SB 505 - Department of Aging - Dementia Care Coordinator and Dementia Care Navigation Programs**  
Position: Favorable

Chair Kelley and Vice Chair Feldman,

My name is Eric Colchamiro, and I am Director of Government Affairs for the Alzheimer's Association in Maryland. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today on this legislation, which: establishes the position of Dementia Care Coordinator in the Department of Aging to oversee dementia care navigation programs; requires each area agency to maintain a dementia care navigation program; authorizes dementia care navigators to provide support services for caregivers; increases community awareness, offers of technical assistance, and establishes relationships with health care providers; and requires the Governor to include \$1,600,000 in the annual budget bill to employ the Dementia Care Coordinator and dementia care navigators

I first want to thank our advocates who shared their stories today. I want to thank the bill sponsor, Senator King. This issue is deeply personal for her—as it is for so many of you on this committee—who understand why support for dementia caregivers matters. Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia is cruel, it is costly, and there is no cure. Nearly 69 percent of dementia caregivers have chronic health conditions, roughly 28 percent of them have depression; and more than one-third of these dementia caregivers provide over 20 hours per week in care.

The legislative initiative before you today is proven. You have testimony, in your packet, from a Dane County Wisconsin dementia caregiving specialist named Joy Schmidt, who shares how her state's legislatively mandated initiative has been invaluable; that program started with just over \$1 million in 2015, and now has over \$7 million in funding. It has provided people with the information they need to access resources, cope with losses caused by dementia and remain engaged in their community. Wisconsin's last report on this program showed:

- over 8,000 contacts with Wisconsin residents, including a service provider referral in 54 percent of cases;
- 682 memory screenings were conducted; staff also trained others at the local level, who conducted over 3200 memory screenings;
- 1903 in-person outreach events were conducted, which reached 46,156 Wisconsin residents with information about dementia and caregiving.

This funding is available. At her February 17<sup>th</sup> budget hearing, the Maryland Department of Aging (MDoA)—which, and not the health department, is the agency that oversees our state's caregiving work—testified that their agency has \$6 million in unallocated American Rescue Plan Act funding, which MDoA has chosen not to use until 2024. That money can be appropriated to this initiative.

I will close with this. We recently closed our annual Alzheimer's advocacy week, where we heard from many of our caregivers about the importance of this legislation. People like Vanessa Hooker joined, a Prince George's County advocate and dementia caregiver, who would have been here today except her mom was hospitalized and Vanessa needs to be present. Thank you to Senator Hershey, who joined us as we heard from a Cecil County advocate who has Alzheimer's, and whose wife shared her complicated journey as a dementia caregiver. And we talked with your colleague Senator Eckardt, who has worked with our dementia support groups, and shared that “we have been trying to figure out how to help caregivers for decades.”

Decades. We have no state funding to provide ongoing support for dementia caregivers. The little aid we do have is strained, as Patricia Grimes testified to, to help families whose loved ones may show signs of confusion and over time are unable to eat, dress, or bathe without help. This bill presents an implementable and proven solution, regarding this disease which disproportionately impacts Black and Latino Marylanders.

Thanks again for the opportunity to speak today. I urge the Committee to pass a favorable report on this legislation—and, like Wisconsin, like Florida, and New York and North Dakota and other states—devote state specific funding to aid dementia caregivers.