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Letter of Support for HB0614
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My name is Dr. Halima Amjad. I am providing testimony in favor of HB0614 as an individual who has intimate professional and personal knowledge of dementia and the impact it has on individuals and families. I am a geriatrician researcher at Johns Hopkins, where I care for people with dementia and their families at the Memory and Alzheimer's Treatment Center and lead research focused on improving dementia diagnosis and support. I currently serve as the Chair of the Maryland Virginia I. Jones Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias Council and most importantly, I have lived dementia through my father who died a year ago after living with young onset dementia at home for 13 years.

Dementia and dementia caregiving are unique in their complexity and burden. Dementia is often detected and diagnosed later than it should be. After diagnosis, unless they've lived it before, most families don't fully understand what to expect, now or in the future. It is not just memory loss. Dementia affects other areas of cognition, including language, personality, and complex thinking. It also inevitably involves functional decline, with help needed for complex tasks and then over time, even for basic personal care and mobility. Behavioral changes are experienced by most families. Unique to dementia is a loss of autonomy and complete dependence on others as the condition progresses. Individuals and families often have medical needs, not just for dementia but also for other health conditions. But their needs are more than just medical – there are educational, emotional, behavioral, social, financial, and physical needs that far exceed what health systems and clinicians can provide. Families need to build a network of support. Right now, overwhelmed caregivers are expected to coordinate and build that network themselves.

Care coordination that is available to all Maryland dementia caregivers is an important step to supporting the invisible army that supports one of our most vulnerable populations, older adults with dementia. Our healthcare system and how we currently address the complex needs in dementia are fragmented, confusing, and inadequate. Care coordination can better tackle these needs and bridge medical, community, and support resources. In my clinical practice, I have many caregivers who would benefit from care coordination and support. Rather than simply empathizing with their struggles, I look forward to having a service that I can link them with as they navigate the most difficult of journeys.

Sincerely,



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