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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony in Support of HB 614
Department of Aging - Dementia Care Navigation Programs**

Good afternoon, Chairman Peña-Melnyk, Vice Chair Kelly and honorable members of the committee. Thank you for this opportunity to present **HB 614 Department of Aging - Dementia Care Navigation Programs**. This bill addresses an issue that is becoming more prevalent as the baby boomer generation is reaching its 70's, 80's and 90's. It does this by creating an outreach program at each of Maryland's local aging departments to connect both with individuals who may have dementia and their caregivers. The local programs that would be developed would outreach to these individuals; they would have defined responsibilities, including to refer people to care providers, offer educational programs about how to manage dementia, and to help people concerned with how their brain is working. The bill provides funding to the Department of Aging, so they can administer and evaluate this program statewide, and distribute it equitably to local jurisdictions to help our seniors.

This legislation was introduced last year, and did not advance out of this committee, because frankly I do not think it was ready. This year, I worked on this bill with the advocates over the interim, and I believe it is ready and it is necessary. In advance of 2022 session, the concept of this bill was presented to all 19 Area Agencies on Aging (AAA); since then, even more outreach was conducted; together, with the Alzheimer's Association, this bill was discussed individually with seven different local aging departments—along with the lobbyist for all AAAs—and considers and incorporates their feedback.

Specifically, in 2023, the legislation:

- Addresses prior concerns of the Department of Aging; it removes the requirement for the agency to hire a coordinator of this work and affords them sufficient resources to staff this program internally.
- Provides more resources for county Aging departments; a smaller county still receives considerable funding under this bill and can fill the requirement to have a program from existing staff, or even with a part-time role if appropriate.
- Listens to all counties. In 2022, this bill allocated funding based on the size of localities. In 2023, it says that funds are to be disbursed based on need.
 - Need is an important term and one that is intentionally included; the Department of Aging should actively engage and listen to the local counties, many of whom have not agreed with the last Administration's funding formula that was heavily based on population size. It is vital that the agency determines the need and thinks about counties not simply in terms of population size, but rather the needs of the population it has.
- Lastly, this bill leaves no one behind. The bill is now written to aid caregivers and "individuals who demonstrate symptoms of dementia that interfere with activities with daily living."
 - What this means is that if someone has Alzheimer's or another dementia, they and their caregiver should be helped. Even if there is no diagnosis yet, they should be informed of resources. If someone has depression—or another mental health condition, which may or may not be dementia—they should receive support.

Colleagues, we all know, have known or will know people impacted by this a form of dementia. Many of us on this Committee have been caregivers who's loved one has had dementia. And today, you will hear from people like Brenda Fried, who spent over \$1 million on being a dementia caregiver for a loved one. And people like Andi

LePore, who is a caregiver now. It is truly trying, both physically and emotionally. It wears on us to see the decline of our loved one; they may refuse to eat, get increasingly angry, have difficulty communicating, wander, and so much more. And it wears on our own physical health as we spend more and more time caring for our loved ones. Yet Maryland—unlike eleven other states—has no dementia specific funding to help the caregivers who devote their time, energy and emotion supporting those who suffer from of this cruel disease.

It is time for Maryland's government to step up and help. There have been 1268 bills introduced in the House this year. Do you know how many involved bringing financial resources to the Maryland Department of Aging? This is it. Right now, our 242,000 dementia caregivers are getting left behind with no state-specific funding to support both those with dementia to have the best quality of life possible and the people who love and care for them, with a great deal of personal sacrifice.

So let us put some funds into meeting this need, including dementia-specific state funds to aid our caregivers—like Brenda, like Andi, and like some of us on this committee. I respectfully ask for a favorable report on HB 614.