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February 23, 2023

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COMMITTEE: House Health and Government Operations Committee
BILL: HB 614 – Department of Aging – Dementia Care Navigation Programs
POSITION: Support

The Horizon Foundation is Howard County’s community health foundation and the largest independent health philanthropy in the state of Maryland. We lead community change so everyone in Howard County can live a longer, better life.

The Foundation is pleased to support HB 614 – Department of Aging – Dementia Care Navigation Programs.

Under HB 614, Maryland will establish a statewide care coordination program providing cognitive assessments, assistance programs for individuals experiencing dementia, supports for caregivers aiding individuals with dementia, technical support for local Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) providing support to residents with dementia, and connecting caregivers and patients to health providers. The Maryland Department of Aging and each of Maryland’s 23 AAAs will be required to establish dementia care coordinator positions.

According to the Alzheimer’s Association, 110,000 people aged 65 and older are living with Alzheimer’s in Maryland, and this number is anticipated to rapidly increase in the coming years. Worse, of the estimated 242,000 unpaid caregivers assisting individuals with Alzheimer’s, 68.8% have chronic health conditions themselves, 27.7% are experiencing depression, and 13.6% are in poor physical health. Without intervention, a sizeable portion of our caregiver population will burnout, creating an even greater barrier to care for Maryland’s older adults.

In recent years, the Horizon Foundation has prioritized access to care, mental health, and assisting our vulnerable aging population. The Foundation’s Emotional Support Human campaign touched on all these priorities by encouraging all Howard residents to show compassion and support for others experiencing mental health challenges.

Just prior to Emotional Support Human campaign, we had learned that many community members were not receiving mental health care until it became an emergency – in 2018, Howard County residents made 2,831 emergency department visits related to a mental health condition. Likewise, by 2035, those aged 65 and older will make up 21.63 percent of Howard County residents, compared to 10.12 percent in 2010. With this sizeable increase in the County’s older adult population, there will be marked increase in those who are providing uncompensated care to individuals with dementia and those with dementia who go without adequate care.

HB 614 is needed to avert a budding crisis among our caregiver population and ensure that those with dementia receive adequate care. For these reasons, the Foundation **SUPPORTS HB 614** and urges a **FAVORABLE** report.

Thank you for your consideration.