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SB0813

March 7, 2024

TO: Members of the Senate Finance Committee

FROM: Nina Themelis, Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations

RE: Senate Bill 813 – Health Care Facilities – Access to Telephones

POSITION: FAVORABLE

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Klausmeier, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** Senate Bill (SB) 813.

SB 813 requires that health care facilities (including nursing homes) ensure that individuals admitted to the facility have access to telephones. It requires the phones to be provided in the patient or resident's room, and that they must be accessible to persons with hearing impairments. This expands upon requirements of the Nursing Home Bill of Rights, versions of which are incorporated in both federal and State laws and regulations. Under the Nursing Home Bill of Rights, nursing home residents have the right to make phone calls, but phone privacy is not necessarily assured. SB 813 is important for supporting quality of life and safety of people staying in nursing homes and other health care facilities.

The Baltimore City Long Term Care Ombudsman program, based in the Baltimore City Health Department Division of Aging, acts as an advocate for residents of Baltimore's 28 nursing homes. Through our work, we know that one of the biggest risk factors for nursing home residents is their isolation from family and friends. Not only can isolation negatively impact quality of life – it can also impact physical health. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, social isolation increases risk of dementia by 50%, stroke by 32%, and heart disease by 29%.ⁱ Passing SB 813 will assure that these residents have convenient and private access to phones with accessibility features, which will be critical in addressing the dangers of isolation.

For these reasons, the BCA respectfully requests a **favorable** report on SB 813.

ⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023). Health Risks of Social Isolation and Loneliness. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/emotional-wellbeing/social-connectedness/loneliness.htm>