



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H., Secretary

January 22, 2025

The Honorable Pamela Beidle
Chair, Senate Finance Committee
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Senate Bill (SB) 223 – Department of Aging – Social Connections Program - Establishment – Letter of Support

Dear Chair Beidle and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) respectfully submits this letter of support for Senate Bill (SB) 223 – *Department of Aging – Social Connections Program - Establishment*. SB 223 renames the Senior Call-Check Service and Notification Program to be the Social Connections Program, and establishes the new program to provide communication services to eligible older adults to promote wellness and purposeful social engagement.

MDH served more than 138,768 individuals aged 65 and older through the Medical Assistance Program in 2024. MDH covers nursing facility services as required by Federal law and offers eight 1915(c) Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) waiver programs that serve targeted populations including medically fragile children with chronic illnesses, aged adults, and individuals with disabilities. While Medical Assistance provides a full set of long term services and supports, individuals must be significantly disabled and meet financial requirements to qualify for coverage. Demand for these services as Maryland's population ages is expected to grow.

In 2024, MDH and Maryland Department of Aging (MDOA) received technical assistance through ADvancing States to identify opportunities to redesign Maryland's system of care for older adults. Core recommendations of the technical assistance received was to improve coordination of community-based supports available through MDOA and other local agencies. The reestablishment of the Social Connections Program will be foundational to the success of MDH and MDOA to partner together to make it easier to access community-based supports for Marylanders to remain at home longer. This will prevent decline in their health, and ultimately, slow their need to access safety-net services through Medical Assistance. MDH looks forward to the continued strong partnership with MDOA as this program is formed to address the needs of older adults across the long term services and supports continuum of care.

If you would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact Sarah Case-Herron, Director of Governmental Affairs at sarah.case-herron@maryland.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "LH Scott", enclosed in a light blue rectangular border.

Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H.
Secretary