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DATE: January 22, 2025
BILL NO.: Senate Bill 223
TITLE: Department of Aging - Social Connections Program - Establishment
COMMITTEE: Senate Finance Committee

Letter of Support with amendments

Description of Bill:

Senate Bill 223 expands the Department of Aging's Senior Call Check Program to include live and virtual web- and text-based communications, as well as possible in-person service options. It also renames the program as the Social Connections Program to reflect these increased options.

Background and Analysis:

The Senior Call Check Program serves over 2,000 older Marylanders daily by making automated calls to program participants to check on their welfare. If a participant does not answer, two follow-up calls are placed before the participant's listed emergency contact person or local services are contacted to conduct an in-person welfare check.

Expanding the current phone call service to include web- and text-based communication will increase the options available to vulnerable older adults and their families, and make the program more accessible to older adults with hearing loss or other communication challenges such as limited English proficiency. Services for the Deaf and hard of hearing, offered in partnership with the Department of Disabilities, are sustainably funded by the Universal Service Trust Fund, which is funded by surcharges on bills for communication services.

This valuable service helps give vulnerable older adults and their families peace of mind, reduces social isolation, and sustains the ability to live independently for those who so desire. Expanding this service to be more inclusive and accessible will help more older Marylanders remain in their homes. For older adults with fixed incomes and other issues associated with aging, in-home support services such as this one provide crucial help in remaining housed and able to live independently.

DHCD Position

The Department of Aging is planning on offering their own clarifying amendments to this bill, and, therefore, the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development respectfully requests a **favorable with amendments** report on Senate Bill 223.

