



**TO:** Health and Government Operations Committee  
**FROM:** LeadingAge Maryland  
**SUBJECT:** Senate Bill 223, Department of Aging - Social Connections Program - Establishment  
**DATE:** March 20, 2025  
**POSITION:** Favorable

LeadingAge Maryland supports Senate Bill 223, Department of Aging - Social Connections Program – Establishment.

LeadingAge Maryland is a community of more than 150 not-for-profit aging services organizations serving residents and clients through continuing care retirement communities, affordable senior housing, assisted living, nursing homes and home and community-based services. Members of LeadingAge Maryland provide health care, housing, and services to more than 20,000 older persons each year. Our mission is to be the trusted voice for aging in Maryland, and our vision is that Maryland is a state where older adults have access to the services they need, when they need them, in the place they call home. We partner with consumers, caregivers, researchers, public agencies, faith communities and others who care about aging in Maryland. LeadingAge Maryland represents the vast majority of CCRCs in the state.

Under Senate Bill 223, the Social Connections Program is designed for Maryland residents aged 60 or older who are at risk of social isolation or could benefit from increased social engagement and wellness checks. Participants will receive regular direct communication, which may include phone calls, text messages, virtual video chats, in-person visits, or other approved communication methods. The Department of Aging will integrate program services with the Telecommunications Access of Maryland program to raise awareness about accessible telecommunications equipment. The program will be funded through the State budget, with a monthly surcharge of up to 18 cents per account. The Department of Aging will collaborate with the Department of Disabilities to develop the program budget and consider the financial needs of related programs funded through these surcharges. The State Tort Claims Act and the Local Government Tort Claims Act will apply to state and local agencies, employees, or agents involved in the program to ensure appropriate liability coverage.

Currently, the Senior Call Check Program serves over 2,000 Marylanders age 65 and over. Each day, an automated call goes out to program participants at a time of day of their choosing to make sure they are ok. If that call goes unanswered, two followup calls are placed before reaching out to their emergency contact person. If there is no response from their

emergency contact person, local non-emergency services will be notified to conduct a welfare check. The result is better peace of mind for vulnerable older adults and their families, and additional support for those who wish to live independently.

Senate Bill 223 proposes to expand the current phone call service to include live and virtual web- and text-based communications, as well as possible in-person service options. The updates will provide more comprehensive and informed assessments of participant's personal welfare and work to reduce social isolation. Additionally, the program will be more accessible to the Deaf, hard of hearing, and those with other communications challenges including people with limited English proficiency. It will also ensure that programs offered for the Deaf and hard of hearing are sustainably funded by the Universal Service Trust Fund (USTF).

By expanding the scope of communication services and fostering interdepartmental collaboration, Senate Bill 223 seeks to improve the well-being of older adults through purposeful social engagement and accessible telecommunications support.

For these reasons, LeadingAge Maryland respectfully requests a favorable report for Senate Bill 223.

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