



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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

January 23, 2025

The Honorable Joseline Peña-Melnyk
Chair, House Health and Government Operations Committee
241 House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

RE: House Bill (HB) 158 – Department of Aging – Social Connections Program - Establishment – Letter of Support

Dear Chair Peña-Melnyk and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Health (Department) respectfully submits this letter of support for House Bill (HB) 158 – *Department of Aging – Social Connections Program - Establishment*. HB 158 renames the Senior Call-Check Service and Notification Program to the Social Connections Program and establishes the new program to provide communication services to eligible older adults to promote wellness and purposeful social engagement.

The Department served more than 138,768 individuals aged 65 and older through the Medical Assistance Program in 2024. The Department 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, putting additional pressure on the state budget in time.

In 2024, the Department and MDOA received technical assistance through ADvancing States to identify opportunities to redesign Maryland's system of care for older adults. Improving coordination of community-based supports available through MDOA and other local agencies was identified as being foundational to future success. Specifically, making it easier to access community-based supports will enable Marylanders to remain at home longer, delay declines in their health, and ultimately, slow their need to access safety-net services through Medical Assistance.

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,



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