

**Testimony Before the House Health & Government Operations Committee
January 23, 2025**

**House Bill 158 - Department of Aging – Social Connections Program – Establishment
** Support ****

The National Association of Social Workers is the largest professional association of social workers in the country, and the Maryland Chapter represents social workers across the state. On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Maryland Chapter (NASW-MD) Committee on Aging, we would like to express our support for House Bill 158. As social workers, we are in favor of this bill because it expands the services currently offered to seniors through the Senior Call Check Service and Notification Program, thereby meeting the needs of an increasing number of isolated older adults.

During the pandemic, we learned a great deal about the suffering of isolated people, both older adults and those with disabilities. This isolation affected them in several ways, including increased risk for depression and dementia, and the very real risk that some people would experience falls or medical episodes while alone, and no one would be aware until it is too late to help them. Now that most pandemic restrictions are lifted, many older adults still face isolation. This bill would build on the successes of the original Senior Call Check program to meet these ongoing needs.

Currently, Senior Call Check provides an automated call to participants each day; if the call is not answered, two additional calls are placed before the service notifies the participant's emergency contact. HB 158 proposes to expand the program by including not just automated calls, but texts, web-based communication and in-person communication. This would allow people to receive the type of communication that meets their needs and would allow those with communication disabilities and limited English proficiency to participate. Of particular note, the bill would allow the service to be accessible to people who are Deaf and hard of hearing and would ensure that these features of the program are funded by the Universal Service Trust Fund.

This bill would offer many isolated older adults an important tool to stay connected to a support system and feel safer. We believe that the new program's personalized approach would appeal to many more Marylanders than the current Senior Call Check.

For those reasons, we ask that you give a favorable report on House Bill 158.

Respectfully,

Karessa Proctor, BSW, MSW
Executive Director, NASW-MD