



**Metropolitan
Washington Ear**

Committee: House Health and Government Operations

Bill Number: House Bill 158 – Department of Aging – Social Connections Program – Establishment

Hearing Date: January 23, 2025

Position: Support

Metropolitan Washington Ear, Inc. (MWE) located in Silver Spring, Maryland, is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization incorporated under the laws of the State of Maryland. MWE provides reading and information services, and independent living skills training for blind, visually impaired, and physically disabled people who cannot effectively read print, see plays, watch television programs and films, or view museum exhibits. Established in 1974, we've been providing quality services throughout Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia for more than 50 years. As an organization that serves the disabled community (in which includes older adults) who face risks of social isolation, we **SUPPORT** HB 158.

HB 158 renames the Senior Call-Check Service and Notification Program in the Maryland Department of Aging (MDOA) to be the Social Connections Program and broadens the program to provide “regular, direct communication” from MDOA (or the department’s designee) to an “eligible participant” to promote wellness and purposeful social engagement. MDOA must integrate services with the Telecommunications Access of Maryland (TAM) Program within the Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD) and collaborate with MDOD to establish the program’s budget.

For individuals living with disabilities, social interaction is more than a social nicety – it’s a critical aspect of their lives. Social interaction for people with disabilities offer numerous benefits, including improved mental health, enhanced learning opportunities, and increased physical well-being.

Social interaction coupled with community integration for individuals with disabilities is not just beneficial – it’s necessary. It fosters a sense of belonging to a more inclusive society. Unfortunately, the social challenges people with disabilities face often lead to social isolation – which can lead to negative outcomes – making community integration an important issue for individuals with disabilities.

HB 158 helps to address social isolation and promote wellness and purposeful social engagement. For these reasons, MWE **supports HB 158** and **asks the committee for a favorable report**.

If we can provide any additional information, please contact Jocelyn I. Collins at jcollins@policypartners.net.