



Testimony HOUSE BILL 158
Health Government and Operations Committee
January 23, 2025
Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Pena-Melnyk and Members of the Health & Government Operations Committee:

The Community Development Network of Maryland (CDN) is the voice for Maryland’s community development sector and serves nearly 200 member organizations. CDN—focuses on small affordable housing developers, housing counseling agencies and community-based non- profits across the state of Maryland. The mission of CDN is to promote, strengthen and advocate for the community development sector throughout Maryland’s urban, suburban and rural communities.

HOUSE Bill 158 establishes the Social Connections Program within the Department of Aging to address social isolation and improve the well-being of older adults. Key elements include: Reducing social isolation among seniors by promoting meaningful social interactions and community engagement; Working with local partners, area agencies on aging, and community organizations to create opportunities for seniors to connect socially; Providing outreach, support groups, intergenerational programs, volunteer opportunities, and equitable access across Maryland communities to technology for virtual connections.

Some researchers believe social capital is strictly the domain of the middle class or that distressed or low-income communities do not have meaningful social relationships. In fact, many researchers (Pew, etc.) have found that even in the most resource-poor neighborhoods, high levels of social capital not only exist but are used as a means to buffer the community against systematic oppression.

Increasing social capital—building strong social networks, relationships, and community connections—can significantly reduce the need for social services and medical intervention. This is a meaningful strategy to reducing medical costs in the state of Maryland, Social connections provide emotional support, reduce stress, and combat loneliness, which are major risk factors for mental health conditions like depression and anxiety. Engaged individuals tend to have better health outcomes.. Socially connected people are at lower risk for chronic illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes, and high blood pressure.

We urge your favorable report for SB 158.

Submitted by Claudia Wilson Randall, Executive Director, Community Development Network