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**HB 158 Department of Aging – Social Connections Program Established
House Health and Government Operations Committee
January 23, 2025**

Good afternoon, Chair Peña-Melnyk and distinguished members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 158 Department of Aging’s Social Connections Program – Establishment Act. My name is Tammy Bresnahan, and I am Senior Director of Advocacy for AARP Maryland. On behalf of our more than two million Marylanders aged 50 and older, thank you for the opportunity to comment on HB 158.

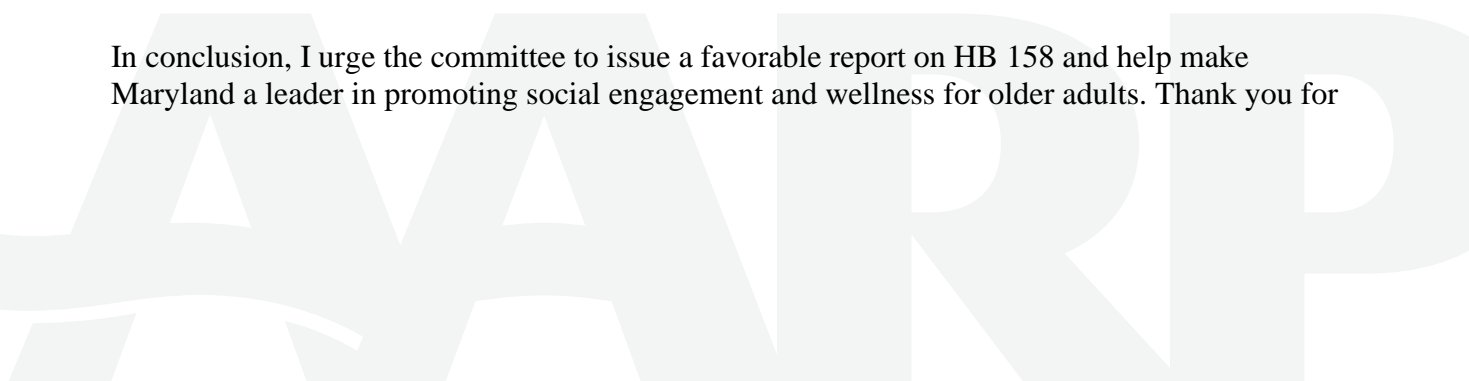
As we all know, social isolation among older adults is a growing concern, with significant implications for physical and mental health. Research has shown that loneliness can be as harmful as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, increasing the risk of health conditions such as heart disease, depression, and cognitive decline. This bill’s focus on transforming and expanding the existing Senior Call–Check Service and Notification Program into the Social Connections Program demonstrates a proactive commitment to promoting wellness and purposeful social engagement among older Marylanders.

The Social Connections Program will build on the foundation of the Senior Call–Check Service by providing not only check-ins but also meaningful opportunities for communication and interaction. This evolution reflects the understanding that social engagement is a cornerstone of healthy aging. By fostering connections, we are helping older adults maintain their independence, improve their quality of life, and reduce the burden on healthcare systems.

I commend the provision authorizing the integration of services between the Social Connections Program and Telecommunications Access of Maryland. This collaboration will enhance accessibility and ensure that older adults with disabilities or technological barriers are not left behind. Additionally, the opportunity for the Department of Aging and the Department of Disabilities to jointly develop the program’s budget underscores a commitment to inclusivity and strategic planning.

This legislation sends a powerful message: we value our older residents and recognize the importance of investing in their well-being. By establishing the Social Connections Program, we are not only addressing the immediate needs of our aging population but also laying the groundwork for a more connected, compassionate, and resilient community.

In conclusion, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on HB 158 and help make Maryland a leader in promoting social engagement and wellness for older adults. Thank you for



your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have. If you need to follow up with me, please contact me at tbresnahan@aarp.org or by calling 410-302-8451.