



Wes Moore | Governor

Aruna Miller | Lt. Governor

Carmel Roques | Secretary

Date: March 18, 2025

Bill Number: **SB223**

Bill Title: Department of Aging - Social Connections Program - Establishment

Committee: House Health and Government Operations

MDOA Position: FAVORABLE ON BILL AS AMENDED

The Department of Aging (MDOA) thanks the Chair and Committee members for the opportunity to submit this testimony in support of its departmental bill, Senate Bill (SB) 223 - Department of Aging - Senior Call Check and Social Connections Program.

The Maryland Department of Aging (MDOA) established the Senior Call-Check Notification Service and Program in 2017. This free program currently serves approximately 2,000 Marylanders age 65 or older with an automated daily phone call. The intended outcome was to increase safety and peace of mind for older adults who live alone, their families and other caregivers. MDOA's goal in introducing SB 223 is simply to grow this outstanding, free program so that it can serve more older Marylanders.

MDOA agreed to amendments to SB223 in collaboration with Senator Kramer and the Senate Finance Committee in January in response to feedback from our bill hearing. These amendments modify the existing program name (adding in the phrase Social Connections and retaining the current Senior Call-Check program name) and reduce the minimum age for participation from 65 to 60. The amended bill still provides MDOA needed authority to expand the types of communication the program may utilize beyond telephone calls, such as, emails, virtual, web-based or in-person communications with participants. This expansion of the types of communications that can be used will help MDOA grow the program overall and make the program more accessible to the deaf and hard of hearing community and others who do not easily access the current telephone call-only service. SB 223 retains its broadened program focus on more purposeful engagement to address social isolation, in addition to the daily safety



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check that currently exists. Removed from the bill with the HGO and Senate Finance committee amendments are any changes to the program's existing funding. The structure for funding the program from the Universal Service Trust Fund, managed by the Department of Disabilities and passed through to the Department of Aging remains unchanged.

These exact same amendments were adopted in January by the Health and Government Operations Committee's Health Occupations and Long-Term Care Subcommittee and full Health and Government Operations Committee to the cross-filed bill, HB 158. **SB 223 and HB 158 are in the exact same posture.**

For these reasons, the Department of Aging respectfully urges a **favorable** report for SB 223 as amended. If you have any questions, please contact Andrea Nunez, Legislative Director, at andrea.nunez@maryland.gov or (443) 414-8183.

Sincerely,

Carmel Roques
Secretary
Maryland Department of Aging