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HB 36 Department of Aging – Aging Services Program Repeal
Senate Finance
January 23, 2025

Good afternoon, Chair Peña-Melnyk and members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee. My name is Tammy Bresnahan, and I serve as the Senior Director of Advocacy for AARP Maryland. On behalf of more than two million Marylanders aged 50 and older, thank you for the opportunity to comment on HB 36.

HB 36 seeks to modernize and consolidate three longstanding, state-funded programs administered by the Maryland Department of Aging (MDOA): Senior Care, the Senior Assisted Living Subsidy Program (SALS), and the Congregate Housing Services Program (CHSP). These programs, initially created as nursing home diversion initiatives in the 1970s and 1980s, have remained largely unchanged. The proposed legislation aims to streamline these services, repeal the Interagency Committee, and introduce a single program administered by the local Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs).

Overview of Existing Programs

1. Senior Care Program:

- Provides case management and gap-filling services for Marylanders aged 65 and older at risk of nursing home placement.
- Services include personal care, medical equipment, respite care, home-delivered meals, and emergency response systems.
- Eligibility: Individuals must be aged 65+, severely or moderately disabled, and meet income and resource criteria.

2. Senior Assisted Living Subsidy Program (SALS):

- Assists low- to moderate-income adults aged 62+ in affording assisted living services such as meals, personal care, and 24-hour supervision.
- Assisted living facilities are monitored and licensed by the Department of Health.

3. Congregate Housing Services Program (CHSP):

- Operates through contracts with local housing authorities and nonprofits to provide services in designated buildings.
- Services include meals, housekeeping, medication management, and limited personal assistance for eligible adults aged 62+ with low or no income.

Proposed Changes

HB 36 aims to:



- Combine these programs into a unified system with standardized eligibility criteria, assessment tools, benefit packages, and performance metrics.
- Allocate approximately \$21 million in state funds more efficiently to serve a broader population.
- Delay implementation until FY 2027, allowing time to convene a workgroup in May 2025 to finalize program elements, regulatory requirements, and implementation plans.

Recommendations

While AARP Maryland supports efforts to improve efficiency and accessibility, we must ensure that the transition does not negatively impact older Marylanders or local governments.

Specifically, we recommend:

- **Comprehensive Stakeholder Engagement:**
Local governments, AAAs, and service providers must be actively consulted throughout the transition process to identify potential challenges and solutions.
- **Thorough Program Analysis:**
Conduct detailed studies of the existing programs to determine which elements work effectively and which can be streamlined. This analysis should involve input from frontline workers who manage these programs daily.
- **Protecting Service Continuity:**
Ensure that no Marylander currently relying on these services experiences' disruptions during or after the transition period.

Conclusion

AARP Maryland supports HB 36 with these considerations in mind. We believe that with careful planning, this legislation can enhance service delivery for older adults while maintaining the vital support they rely on.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I am happy to answer any questions or provide additional information. Please feel free to contact me at tbresnahan@aarp.org or 410-302-8451.