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Health Committee

*Subcommittees*

Elder and Long-Term Care

Maternal, Infant, and Child Health

Public Health and  
Minority Health Disparities



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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Judiciary Committee

Chair Delegate J. Sandy Bartlett

Vice Delegate Debra Davis

101 Taylor House Office Building

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present House Bill 963. This is the second time this committee is seeing this bill and I want to sincerely thank you all for passing this bill last year. I am hopeful that bringing it forward earlier in the session along with the work I did on this in the interim will help us move it across the street in the Senate and finally get it across the finish line.

The intent of the bill remains the same, but we have simplified how we are approaching it.

House Bill 963 repeals an outdated restriction in Estates and Trusts law that prevents certain otherwise qualified individuals from being granted letters of administration. In practice, this means that in some cases, a surviving spouse or close family member cannot serve as the personal representative of a loved one's estate, even when they would otherwise have statutory priority.

This bill grew out of a tragedy that deeply affected our state: the collapse of the Key Bridge. A widow who lost her husband in that disaster was unable to immediately serve as the personal representative of his estate because of this statutory restriction. At a time when she should have been allowed to grieve and manage her family's affairs, she instead had to navigate additional legal hurdles and incur unnecessary costs to access benefits that were rightfully hers.

This legislation is about ensuring that close family members are not barred from handling a loved one's estate because of an outdated technical limitation.

All existing safeguards remain in place. A personal representative must still be an adult, mentally competent, not convicted of a serious crime without good cause shown, and either named in a

valid will or entitled under the statutory order of priority. Registers of Wills continue to supervise the process, and bonding requirements still apply when necessary to protect estates.

After I brought this bill to you all last year and spent the interim working, I have found this issue is particularly relevant in our state where many residents live and work in the DC region for international institutions, diplomatic missions, and academic programs. Maryland should have a probate system that reflects the reality of the families who live here and ensures that estate administration can proceed efficiently and lawfully when tragedy strikes.

Maryland is in the minority nationally in maintaining this restriction. Removing it modernizes our probate code while preserving strong guardrails.

House Bill 963 is about fairness, efficiency, and making sure our laws work for families during some of the most difficult moments of their lives.

I respectfully ask for a favorable report on House Bill 963. Thank you for your consideration.