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SB 725

March 12, 2020

TO: Members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

FROM: Nicholas Blendy, Deputy Director of Government Relations

RE: Senate Bill 725 – Maryland Department of Health – Public Health Outreach Programs – Cognitive Impairment, Alzheimer’s Disease, and Other Types of Dementia

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Pinsky, Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** Senate Bill (SB) 725.

SB 725 requires the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), in partnership with the Department of Aging, the Virginia I. Jones Alzheimer’s Disease and Related Disorders Council, and the Alzheimer’s Association, to incorporate certain information regarding cognitive impairment, Alzheimer’s disease, and other types of dementia into relevant public health outreach programs administered by the Maryland Department of Health.

The Alzheimer’s Association estimates that 110,000 Marylanders 65 and over had Alzheimer’s Disease in 2018, and that this number will grow to 130,000 by 2025.¹ Alzheimer’s Disease and Related Disorders (ADRD) disproportionately affects minority populations. The Association estimates that “Older African Americans are about two times more likely than older whites to have Alzheimer’s or other dementias, and that

¹ Alzheimer’s Association; *2018 Alzheimer’s Disease Facts and Figures*.

“Older Hispanics are about one and one-half times more likely than older whites to have Alzheimer’s or other dementias.”²

This data reveals that ADRD places a disproportionate burden on minority communities, adding to the health disparities experienced by those communities. Addressing the growing prevalence of ADRD, particularly in underserved minority communities, should be part of the mission of public health.

A growing body of research indicates that ADRD is linked to other chronic diseases, particularly heart disease and diabetes. The BCA supports addressing the impact of ADRD by modifying public health education programs and materials to reflect the connection between overall health and brain health. Themes that public health education could address include:

1. “What is good for the body is good for the brain;” healthier lifestyles and preventive behavior not only can reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease and diabetes, but it may also reduce the risk of dementia.
2. The important role of caregivers in supporting people with dementia and the importance of maintaining caregiver health and wellbeing.
3. Identifying the warning signs of dementia, and encouraging persons with concerns about cognitive decline to consult with their health providers and to seek help.
4. The importance of advance planning, particularly for persons who have received a diagnosis of dementia and for their families.

By fostering increased flow of information around ADRD through MDH and its partners, this bill will assist in raising awareness of the connections between overall health and brain health.

For the foregoing reasons, we respectfully request a **favorable** report on Senate Bill 725.

² Centers for Disease Control & Alzheimer’s Association, *Healthy Brain Initiative, State and Local Public Health Partnerships to Address Dementia: The 2018-2023 Road Map*.