

Senate Bill 966

Health Facilities – Assisted Living Programs – Referrals and Licenses

Senate Finance Committee

March 5, 2020

Support

Catholic Charities of Baltimore strongly supports HB 966, which would make it a civil offense for referral agencies to refer clients to unlicensed assisted living facilities; require more transparency by referral agencies by requiring them to register with the state and disclose financial relationships with assisted living facilities; and provide the Attorney General the authority to shut down unlicensed assisted living facilities in certain cases and investigate referral agency violations.

Inspired by the gospel to love, serve and teach, Catholic Charities provides care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. As the largest human service provider in Maryland working with tens of thousands of Marylanders each year, and an employer of over 2,000 people, we recognize the dignity of older adults to live in safe and supportive environments.

Families are struggling to find supportive, appropriate living situations for their older loved ones. These families are often hit unaware by an older loved one's struggles at home and increasing inability to live independently. These caregivers are not typically experts in the realm of aging services. They have vulnerable, older family members; these caregiving families are vulnerable themselves given limited options, including very few affordable assisted living facilities. They seek solutions for how to deal with their need to take care of their spouse, parent, loved one – while also maintaining their own lives – getting to work, taking care of younger family members. They not only lack the right answers, they do not even know the right questions to ask. This population of caregivers are often themselves struggling financially. Their decision-making window is often short and under pressure, due to health care needs that exceed living at home independently and inpatient stays that must include a discharge plan. They often have health care needs themselves.

This population of caregivers and the older adults in their care are vulnerable to referral agencies incentivized by facility demands rather than person-centered planning, and by unlicensed facilities that may not meet basic requirements to ensure adequate, supportive care. In all of the decision-making that faces them, in their overwhelmed desire for a solution, they may not dig in far enough to see the incentives at play nor understand the basic requirements of an assisted living facility, including licensure.

At Catholic Charities, our Answers for the Aging service takes calls from caregivers, friends, families and older adults themselves – people suddenly faced with issues of aging do not always know the right questions. It is through unbiased listening to their stories that person-centered options come to light and appropriate planning can begin. These caregivers and the older adults in their care are vulnerable and all efforts should be made to support them, rather than allow for them to be taken advantage of by ill-incentivized referral agencies and unlicensed assisted living facilities.

On behalf of the families and older adults we serve, Catholic Charities of Baltimore appreciates your consideration, and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for SB 966.

Submitted By: Regan K. Vaughan, Director of Advocacy