



6811 Campfield Road
Baltimore, MD 21207

TO: The Honorable Delores Kelley
Chairwoman, Finance Committee

FROM: LeadingAge Maryland

SUBJECT: House Bill 983, Nursing Homes - COVID-19 – Visitation

DATE: March 23, 2021

POSITION: **Favorable**

LeadingAge Maryland writes to request a favorable report on House Bill 983, Nursing Homes - COVID-19 - Visitation.

LeadingAge Maryland is a community of not-for-profit aging services organizations serving residents and clients through continuing care retirement communities, affordable senior housing, assisted living, nursing homes and home and community-based services. We represent more than 120 not-for-profit organizations, including the vast majority of CCRCs in Maryland. Our mission is to expand the world of possibilities for aging in Maryland. We partner with consumers, caregivers, researchers, faith communities and others who care about aging in Maryland.

Consistent with federal requirements, House Bill 983 requires the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) develop guidelines relating to the restrictions on personal and compassionate care visitation that a nursing home may impose to reduce the spread of COVID-19 or another disease that constitutes a catastrophic health emergency. The guidelines must describe the circumstances under which visitation may be restricted, limit the spread of COVID-19 or another disease that constitutes a catastrophic health emergency. The guidelines regarding personal care visitation must require a nursing home to allow visitation by a personal care visitor, establish procedures for the designation of a personal care visitor by a resident or a legal representative of the resident. Also, House Bill 983 requires, as practicable and when available, alternative means of communication with visitors if a nursing home determines that an in-person visit would endanger the health and safety of a patient, resident, or member of the staff.

LeadingAge Maryland appreciates the Sponsor's intent and we fully support family visitation. Social connection is vital to overall well-being, and we fully support and promote opportunities for residents to connect and visit with loved ones. Our members continually work to facilitate connection through technology, and whenever possible, in person visits.

During non-COVID-19 times, there are ample opportunities and support for in person visitation. There are existing robust regulations and guidance that inform providers approach to visitation. There are both federal and state regulations and guidance that speak to visitation in nursing homes, state regulations for assisted living, and the State Ombudsman program through the Department of Aging to assist with ensuring residents rights in a variety of settings.

Our members share the frustration families experienced as they sought to visit with relatives in the last year. Often caught between the family and the ever-changing requirements, providers witnessed how challenging visitation is during the pandemic. LeadingAge Maryland supports clear guidelines from MDH.

For these reasons, LeadingAge Maryland respectfully requests a favorable report for House Bill 983.

For additional information, please contact Aaron J. Greenfield, 410.446.1992