

Testimony of the Alzheimer's Association Greater Maryland and National Capital Area Chapters
SB 005 - Public Health – Implicit Bias Training and the Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities
Position: Favorable with Amendment

Chair Kelley and Vice Chair Feldman,

My name is Eric Colchamiro, and I am the Director of Government Relations for the Alzheimer's Association in Maryland. I write today in strong support of SB 005, and with a request to amend it with one word.

We applaud this legislation's focus on and budget requirement for the Health Department's Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities. Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia have a disproportionate impact on Black and Latino Marylanders, who are twice and 1.5 times as likely to be diagnosed with dementia than White Marylanders.

Our organization directly engages organizations such as African American churches—across Maryland-- about the Association's resources, including our 24-7 helpline for families. We have, for the past 16 years, held the Pythias and Virginia I. Jones African American Community Forum on Memory Loss, which educates over 400 participants each year. And in 2020, we held—in addition to numerous ongoing programs—our first ever Latino Summit, which provided valuable information regarding how Alzheimer's affects the Latino community, and highlighted the many Spanish language programs and resources.

We want an Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities which is empowered by the Health Department, in terms of funding and in terms of how it is prioritized within the agency. We want an Office with a robust community engagement staff, so we can partner with them in connecting with the African American community; the Office could be such an important referral pathway for families. We want an Office that can dream big—about how to address disparities related to dementia, and about so many other health issues—and holds its annual health equity conference in different communities, across the state, to reach people in need of its information and resources.

Lastly, we would ask that the bill sponsor consider a one-word amendment to this legislation. The Office is tasked with writing an annual "Health Care Disparities Policy Report Card", on diseases identified by the Maryland Health Care Commission. As the bill notes, these diseases include (but are not limited to): cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, infant mortality, and asthma. We would ask that dementia, which impacts over 110,000 Marylanders—a figure that is expected to grow by 18 percent over the next five years—is explicitly added to that list. This one-word addition, amidst a newly empowered Office of Minority Health, can go a long way in addressing an epidemic that impacts 1 in 3 seniors across our state.

Thank you for your time, your consideration of this one-word amendment, and thank the bill sponsors for this important piece of legislation.