

**Testimony in Support of HB 119 - Public Health Outreach Programs-
Cognitive Impairment, Alzheimer's Disease
and Other Types of Dementia**

House Health and Government Operations Committee

January 19, 2021

Position: Support

The Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) is the state's only volunteer, nonprofit citizen's organization that brings together consumers, families, professionals, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and mental illness. We appreciate this opportunity to again submit testimony in support of House Bill 119.

MHAMD's Coalition on Mental Health and Aging is comprised of representatives from aging, mental health, consumer, family and professional associations, and government agencies working together to improve the quality and accessibility of behavioral health assessment, treatment, recovery and illness prevention services for older Marylanders. We have always considered dementia within our purview because of the high rates of behavioral and psychiatric symptoms experienced by individuals afflicted by Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. In addition, we count the Alzheimer's Association Maryland Chapter among our valued members. We appreciate the opportunity to offer support of HB 119.

It is essential that Maryland acknowledges the fact that dementia is a growing public health crisis requiring full attention and appropriate resourcing from the Maryland Department of Health. Whether the cause of dementia is Alzheimer's disease, Stroke, Parkinson's disease, Multiple Sclerosis, the effects of delirium or another cause, Maryland citizens and their care partners suffer immeasurably. Both the public and health care providers must be informed of symptoms, early detection, diagnostic options and resources for support.

Maryland currently has little to no coordinated response or specific outreach campaign to Alzheimer's disease and related dementia, a virus that is afflicting 110,000 Marylanders, has claimed 1,200 lives in 2019, and costs Medicaid 1.16 billion dollars annually. That this health crisis is projected to grow by 18% in the next five years demands top prioritization for public education and resource information across the state.

HB 119 simply requires that the Department of Health, in partnership with the Department of Aging, the Virginia I. Jones Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Council and the Alzheimer's Association, incorporate information into health outreach programs administered by MDH to:

- **Increase community awareness and understanding** of Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia, the value of early detection and diagnosis, and ways to reduce the risk of

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cognitive decline especially among individuals in Black and Latino communities who are at greatest risk for developing dementia.

- **Educate health care providers** regarding the importance of early detection and timely diagnosis of cognitive impairment as well as information on validated assessment tools and reimbursement methods.

MHAMD supports HB 119 as it provides guidance for MDH as they address the epidemic rates of dementia. We would also support future efforts to require education and training of health and human service workers, and for MDH to implement the recommendations of the Alzheimer's disease and Related Disorders Commission. In the meantime, passing HB 119 during this Legislative Session will harness the momentum of the Alzheimer's Association, the expertise of the Virginia I. Jones Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Council, and the information networks of the Department of Health and the Department of Aging.

The Mental Health Association of Maryland strongly urges a favorable report on HB 119.