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MAYOR

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HB 903

February 18, 2021

TO: Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee

FROM: Natasha Mehu, Director of Government Relations

RE: House Bill 903 – Task Force to Study the Maryland Public Guardianship Program

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Pendergrass Vice Chair Peña-Melnyk, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 903.

HB 903 creates a State Task Force to evaluate the Maryland Public Guardianship Program, administered by the Maryland Department of Aging (MDoA). The Task Force will include representatives from the State Senate and House of Delegates, local Area Agencies on Aging, the Bar Association, the health care industry, and advocacy organizations. The Task Force will be charged with examining best practices for public guardianship programs within the State of Maryland and report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly.

The Maryland Public Guardianship program serves the most vulnerable older adults in the State of Maryland: those persons 65 and over who a court has determined to lack capacity to make decisions about their own well-being, including health care, and for whom no family members or friends are available to be their advocates or surrogate decision-makers. In FY 2019, 825 persons received services through the program. This number will grow as the population of Maryland ages.

The Secretary of the Maryland Department of Aging and the Directors of nineteen local Area Agencies on Aging are assigned guardianship responsibilities by the courts. The Area Agencies on Aging receive limited State funding to carry out these responsibilities, by hiring case managers.

The program lacks standards, clear objectives, and a methodology for funding allocations. The Task Force will create those standards, drawing upon best practices

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established by national organizations and experts in the field. It will also devise a strategy for funding sustainability for the program. We believe that such an evaluation of the public guardianship program is long overdue.

We respectfully request a **favorable** report on House Bill 903.