

Dear Honorable Senators,

I am writing to express my support for SB0624, which would hold all senior living referral services that operate in Maryland to the same rigorous standard.

Finding assisted living for my parents in March 2021 was one of the most stressful experiences I have been through. Without taking up too much of your time with the detail, I had a complicated and time-sensitive situation where both of my parents needed differing levels of care as soon as possible. I initially tried to research facilities on my own, but found that the information I could get online was limited unless I went through what seemed like the gatekeeper for this type of information – A Place for Mom.

Desperate, I signed up for an account with A Place for Mom. My phone rang immediately, and they were quite persistent until I answered their call. Their representative was sympathetic and initially seemed very helpful. However, after that first call and a promise to follow up, I never heard from her, and, frankly, was too in the thick of things to reach back out to her. Two assisted living facilities that had been given my information reached out to me – which I hadn't anticipated. It was not transparent that my personal information would be shared with these facilities. Thankfully, as I continued my search for facilities, I found a local senior care placement service that met my family's needs and served as the kind of advocate I needed.

SB0624 is important to protect people, like myself, who are going through a stressful time and are very vulnerable as they navigate this unfamiliar situation. Most people know very little about assisted living and skilled nursing options until they are thrown into a situation where they need, and large clearinghouse companies, like A Place for Mom, can exploit these folks. They inhibit decision-making by gatekeeping access to information about facilities that should be publicly available. They are allowed to gather personal information without providing a real service or delivering a product, under the pretense that they will do both. I didn't realize what I could expect from such a service until I found a local placement agency that gave me the help I needed. The local agency surveyed my family's medical and financial needs, connected me with facilities that could meet those needs, and walked me through the process from beginning to end. That is what people in this situation need.

Any family seeking senior placement assistance for a loved one should feel confident that when they contact a placement service, they will get the help they need and their information will be protected. It is essential that all senior care placement services operating in Maryland be held to the same rigorous standard. In that spirit, I respectfully ask that you pass SB0624. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Tracie Ulmes

Joppa, MD