

SB624 - SUPPORT  
Kristen Zihmer  
Windchimes LLC  
[Kzihmer@windchimesllc.com](mailto:Kzihmer@windchimesllc.com) | 443 – 340- 7085

SB624 - Favorable  
Finance Committee  
February 23, 2022

Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman and Members of the Finance Committee:

My name is Kristen Zihmer, I own Windchimes LLC, a private referral and placement agency in Carroll County, and I am in support of Senate Bill 624. By providing guidance, education, and advocacy, Windchimes assists seniors and their families in Carroll, Baltimore and Howard Counties find the most appropriate assisted living communities. I hold a bachelor's degree from Salisbury University, am a Certified Senior Advisor®, hold a Senior Living Counselor Certificate® and have completed the Certificate on Aging Program at Johns Hopkins University. To further support local senior initiatives, I serve as the President of the Senior Provider Information Network and sit on the Healthy Aging Leadership Team in Carroll County.

I was born and raised in Carroll County: I live just three miles from the family home I grew up in and about thirteen miles from the orchard that my father's mother, Thelma Mae Ditman a.k.a. Mommom, grew up on in New Windsor. While close in proximity, our childhoods were vastly different. She grew up one of eight children, whose main objective was to work their father's land. Only receiving an 8<sup>th</sup> grade formal education, what Thelma actually learned was the value of hard work and true grit. The kind of grit that later allowed her to work 2 full-time jobs while raising her sons (including one at Black and Decker—3<sup>rd</sup> shift factory work while her young boys were at home sleeping.)

My childhood memories of Thelma are synonymous. Work. Work. Church. And more work. While watching me and my siblings, it was common for her to put us to work – jarring fruits and vegetables, washing dishes, watering the garden, etc. Truth be told, I did not like going to her house as a child. However, as I grew into adolescence and young adulthood, my outlook changed completely. Behind all of the work, I could see her strength, determination and value system. While in high school and attending the local Community College, I would stop by her house daily to get a home cooked meal and talk to her about my life. Thelma's life had been much harder than mine, but she always listened and provided strong, yet loving feedback to all of my woes. Slowly but surely, I no longer saw her as a taskmaster. I saw her for who she truly was, a **Titan**.

I was in my mid-twenties when Thelma started to decline. Inching toward her nineties, her body and mind started to slip away. Her once strong frame now began to sway. Her sharp reasoning started to waiver. Over the course of the next 5 years, the grit that once gleaned out of every fiber of her being was hard spot. Thelma relied on my father and uncle for all of her personal affairs. Further, she relied on an assisted living community for most all of her physical activities. This once mighty woman was now dependent on others for everything.

My family was exceptionally grateful for each professional that helped Thelma along the way. Each caring professional that was both vetted and held to ethical standards. From the doctors who proscribed her medications, to the aids who helped maintained her hygiene, to the financial planners who were

managing her finances—each required to adhere to a level of honesty and decency. However, had my family used a referral agency to help find Thelma assisted living—that agency would not have been held to any standards.

Assisted Living Referrers are no different than other healthcare professionals and should be held to standards as such. Senate Bill 966 in 2020 was a wonderful start, however, the nature and intimacy that Referral Agencies have with aging clients necessitates much more. It demands a level of professionalism that:

- Requires referrers and employees to obtain a criminal history check
- Requires referrers hold general liability insurance
- Prevents referrers from referring clients to unlicensed facilities
- Prevents the referrer from becoming a client's Power of Attorney
- Prevents the referrer from moving a client into an assisted living that the referrer owns

Why? Why is this important? Because even Titans grow old and become vulnerable. Even Titans need protections in place. I urge the Senate to pass SB624 to help protect our once Titans, our vulnerable seniors.

