

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB531:Maryland Health Care Commission – Assisted Living Programs Study

MARYLAND STATE LEGISLATIVE 2022 SESSION - SENATE HEARING - FINANCE COMMITTEE

Thursday, February 16, 2022 at 1pm

Submitted By: Eileen Bennett, Program Manager II, Montgomery County, MD Long Term Care Ombudsman

Thank you, Chairwoman Kelley and members of the Finance Committee, for allowing me to address the key elements outlined and supported in SB531. Thank you Senator Beidle for your sponsorship of the bill. Thank you to those are interested in the best possible healthcare practices and protections for our most vulnerable citizens living in long term care settings in Maryland. This study is crucial for consumers of assisted living services, and their support networks, have access to reliable data and tools which provide insight into the services provided within these smaller assisted living settings.

As a brief introduction, I am Eileen Bennett, directing the local long term care ombudsman program in Montgomery County. I am also speaking on behalf of other local programs statewide in partnership with the state ombudsman who also providing testimony in support of this bill today. The term “ombudsman” is a Swedish a concept, adopted within the Older Americans Act to specific designation to the Long Term Care Ombudsman serving residents of nursing homes and licensed assisted living in Maryland. Through federal and state law, the ombudsman program members are tasked with being the advocates for these residents. I have been a member of the program since 1989 and have personally experienced the changes in care which evolved from a marketing concept to the regulations governing licensed assisted living in Maryland.

However, the available public information regarding services in small assisted living regulations have not kept pace with the continuous attempts of the industry to attract and retain residents in these communities. SB531 provides the Maryland Health Care Commission with the directive to develop a study, collecting relevant data on the service and practices which includes very complex health care which is equal to care provided in nursing home settings.

For example, I was working in the ombudsman program when assisted living laws were first introduced in Maryland, there were eight smaller homes which were enrolled in the assisted living program. Twenty three (23) years later, there are over 200 homes in Montgomery County with nine or less licensed beds, and little data is available about their quality of care offered or delivered for consumers to compare in their search for services. Some questions can include demographic, diagnosis, prognosis, activities and care provided within the setting, but also who monitors the quality of life for the residents in these smaller settings on a regular basis. The study should include admission, transfer, and discharge practices to assurance that residents are not transferred within a variety of locations owned by the same operator. The Maryland Health Care commission study should allow a mechanism to develop evaluation tools and public data that the consumer can access in decision making at the time of placement searches.

The ombudsman program continuously receives the feedback from family members who are seeking the smaller setting of care for their loved ones but find little reliable data on which to base their placement decisions.

In Montgomery County, I can attest there are very few assisted living settings which do not have residents with memory impairment. Their families deserve the type of information that can be provided through the Maryland Healthcare Commission Study outlined in SB531

Thank you for allowing me to share my professional insight in support of SB531.

-Eileen Bennett, Montgomery County MD LTC Ombudsman

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