

Testimony of the Alzheimer's Association Greater Maryland and National Capital Area Chapters
SB 531 - Maryland Health Care Commission - Assisted Living Programs - Study
Position: Favorable

Chair Kelley and Vice-Chair Feldman,

My name is Eric Colchamiro, and I am Director of Government Affairs for the Alzheimer's Association in Maryland. Thank you for the opportunity to be before you here today on Senate Bill 531, legislation which requires a study of Maryland's 1285 assisted living facilities with nine or fewer beds.

I want to start by thanking the bill's sponsor, Delegate Beidle, for her leadership on issues related to long-term care, including vulnerable Marylanders with Alzheimer's and other dementia. Last session, this Committee passed what is now Chapter 480 of 2021, the law she sponsored which requires an update to Maryland's assisted living facility regulations. I am pleased to say that the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) is implementing that law, and I hope that the regulations are adopted by the law's December 1, 2022 codified deadline.

The legislation before you today, like that law, emanates from the work of Maryland's Oversight Committee for the Quality of Care in Nursing Homes and Assisted Living Facilities. The bill asks the Maryland Health Care Commission (MHCC) to explore key questions about these smaller providers who comprise 76 percent of our state's assisted living facilities. When asked about these smaller facilities recently, Stevanne Ellis—our state's long-term care ombudswoman, who frequently works with them in her work to aid residents—described them as often someone's home. She added that they could be in your neighborhood, and you might not realize it, because there is often no sign on the door. Sometimes residents of these assisted living facilities share bedrooms. The kitchen can be like one in your house; it is not an industrial kitchen. The caregiver may do everything; the laundry, the housekeeping, and the care for the residents. It is often a significantly different environment than Maryland's larger assisted living providers.

The Alzheimer's Association is grateful that the bill's sponsors want to learn more about how we can elevate the quality of care these facilities provide. For example:

- MHCC conducts an annual long-term care survey of facilities with 10 or more beds; yet smaller facilities are not under their purview. What can we learn, from an analysis of MDH inspection data, about the quality of care these smaller providers offer?
- In the last five fiscal years of data available, according to MDH, Maryland has averaged 130 closures of assisted living facilities; yet the total number of providers has increased. As we try to enhance the quality of care in these residential settings, what portion of this significant turnover is related to these smaller providers any why is there so much turnover? And, on a separate but related note as to their stability, are smaller providers receiving adequate reimbursement rates for their services provided?
- And as we continue to work our way through COVID-19, and prepare for the next public health emergency, Marylanders have benefitted from MDH's easily accessible coronavirus reporting website. That site, which maintains data about COVID in congregate care settings, does not include any of these 1285 providers on its main dashboard, due to patient confidentiality concerns. Is there a way to protect patient privacy, yet help countless Marylanders quickly know if their small providers have had a COVID-19 case at their facility?

I am pleased to report that this legislation was developed in coordination with LifeSpan, who is here today in support of this bill. We have also spoken, on multiple instances, with the Maryland Health Care Commission; they have expressed support for looking closely at this issue.

Thank you for your time and the Alzheimer's Association urges a favorable report on this bill.