

Testimony of Oussama Souadi, RA
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Before the
Senate Finance Committee
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SUPPORT – Senate Bill 743 – Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Affordable Assisted
Living Enhanced Care Pilot Program

Good afternoon, Chair Kelley and Members of the Finance Committee. For the record, I am Oussama Souadi, partner at Gragg Cardona Partners, a purpose driven Real Estate and Community Investment organization here in support of Senate Bill 743.

Since 1999, the principals of Gragg Cardona Partners LLC have been at the center of efforts by the District of Columbia and community leaders to revitalize neighborhoods and generate broad based employment and business opportunities, by using public/private partnerships to bring about new investments in housing, commercial space, and community facilities.

For more than two decades Gragg Cardona Partners has been supporting and investing in the positive transformation of neighborhoods in the Greater Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. Our sense of purpose, energy, transparency and collaborative character underlay the creation of more than 1,100 units of rental/for sale housing, including nearly 400 affordable units, plus 71,500 square feet of new neighborhood oriented commercial space.

Many of these residential spaces are the result of partnerships with local governments and or agencies wanting to re-energize neighborhoods, stimulate economic development and empower residents.

Our work has won the support of institutional investors, and national/local lenders. We are comfortable and experienced partnering with local governments, negotiating win-win outcomes with community stakeholders, layering financial resources, and developing high quality places for people to live, work, and play.

We do this with respect for the communities we are a part of. We positively and innovatively engage in shaping and preserving the physical, social, and economic

context in which people live. And doing so by contributing our values and knowledge in a fashion that merits respect and considers community interests.

One of the great examples of this approach is our recent and ongoing successful collaboration with the District of Columbia government, both the legislative and administrative branches. This collaboration has enabled our team to establish a program that is delivering, in the year 2022, 157 apartments, brand new, high quality, affordable assisted living community that will serve the district's most vulnerable population, the elderly who earn the lowest of incomes. This programmatic approach will deliver over 600 additional apartments over the next 3 years. These communities will leverage private equity and debt capital of over \$350 Million, and most importantly, no public funding is needed for construction. These communities are built and financed entirely with private funding through the sale of federal tax-exempt bonds and equity raised from the sale of 4% Low Income Housing Tax Credits.

This innovative approach will not only yield world class and affordable assisted living communities that deliver services to the state's senior population, but the communities will individually contribute economically to their surrounding by providing:

- Construction Jobs and Contracts
- 60-80 Permanent Jobs – Entry Level and Professional Level Positions
- Community Space
- ~\$4 Million in annual service and employment related expenditures

This bill would take the innovative approach needed to create access for our seniors who are now being left behind. It would create a new Affordable Assisted Living Enhanced Care Pilot Program that leverages Medicaid funding to pay for services to attract developers and investors to build assisted living communities for our low and moderate income seniors.

As a resident of Montgomery County for the last eight years, I believe my adoptive state of Maryland can leverage our current approach and ongoing success in its neighboring Washington, DC to help deliver much needed support to the seniors throughout the state, and I believe strongly that it is through true collaboration and partnership between the public and private sectors that

innovations are achieved in the pursuit of serving the public, I urge you to support this important piece of legislation.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions.