

February 9, 2022

**HB 430 - SUPPORT**

My name is Reba Cornman. I have a MSW and was specifically trained and worked in gerontology and geriatrics for just over forty years. Most of my professional career at the University of Maryland Baltimore and previously with the Maryland Gerontological Association focused on interprofessional training for professionals in the field of aging, students pursuing health care, social work and law degrees, for family caregivers and personnel working in long term care. I am now retired and serve on the board of a number of non-profits serving low income older adults living in Baltimore City. My testimony today is forward-looking and should not be taken as a reflection about any of the four Secretaries of Aging to date; it is based on my decades of extensive work in the field of aging.

The next and subsequent Secretaries of the Maryland Department of Aging should be required to have substantial training and professional background in the field of aging services. This is essential in order to be effective and timely in the delivery of necessary services to the ever increasing proportion of older adults. The Secretary must demonstrate leadership and understanding of the myriad social service, health and mental health issues confronting older adults and their caregivers from day one. The Secretary must be familiar with what exists, what doesn't, as well as the possible funding for necessary services and interventions throughout Maryland – and should know which programs are underfunded and need more attention. The Secretary would understand how a change in policy or regulation would play out in the real world and what the consequences would be for older adults. This expertise is not and cannot be easily or quickly learned on the job. The necessary expertise only comes from working in the field and understanding the diversity of our older adult population as just stated. By having this expertise, the Secretary becomes an immediate leader of a very important public agency and its personnel working within the department and to the area agencies on aging serving in each county of our state. In addition, the Secretary becomes a source to colleagues leading other agencies in State and local governments which also serve older adults. Collaboration across department lines should be actively pursued in order to insure quality service delivery to older adults and their caregivers. The Maryland Department of Aging needs a strong advocate who is a trusted leader within State Government in order to insure funding from the State budget and in bringing federal dollars to Maryland.

Maryland can serve as a strong model in how it supports its older adults, who have been tremendous assets to the economy, workforce, families and society as a whole over a lifetime. We need a strong, collaborative and vibrant leader to move us forward with intent and pride in expanding the appreciation of the work of the Maryland Department of Aging on behalf of the entire population of the State of Maryland as we age.

Thank you.