

Testimony Before the House Health and Government Operations Committee

House Bill 544 Health Facilities – Residential Service Agencies – Reporting Requirement

Support

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Maryland Chapter (NASW-MD) Committee on Aging, we would like to express our support for House Bill 544 Health Facilities – Residential Service Agencies – Reporting Requirement.

As social workers, we are in favor of this bill because it provides necessary data to support the caregivers of vulnerable older adults and persons with disabilities. The bill requires residential service agencies who receive payments from Medicaid to provide the Maryland Department of Health with an annual report on the wages and employment conditions of personal care aides. Maryland and many other states face significant challenges in adequately staffing personal care aides and one of the reasons for this is poor compensation and benefits. Worker shortages and worker turnover result in poorer care for older Marylanders and Marylanders with disabilities.

Most personal care aides are employed less than full time, have hours that change frequently, and do not receive health benefits or paid leave. As a result, many work for more than one agency to make ends meet. According to the Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, the national average wage for a personal care aide is \$13.02 per hour. If the person works full time, this would result in an annual salary of just over \$27,000 per year. This is around 150% of the federal poverty line for a family of two (\$26,130). However, as previously stated, it is difficult for personal care aides to find full time work.

Currently, older Marylanders and Marylanders with disabilities rely on personal care aides to remain in their homes rather than having to enter nursing homes. Most of these individuals would prefer to remain in the community, and living in the community is less costly for the state of Maryland through the Medicaid program.

This bill would not solve these staffing issues, but consistent reporting of the conditions of these workers including wages, employee vs contractor, health insurance, workers' compensation, and sick and safe leave would allow these working conditions to be addressed. Improving the working conditions of personal care aides would make these jobs more appealing, leading to a more secure workforce and more consistent care for community dwelling older Marylanders and Marylanders with disabilities.

Respectfully,

Mary Beth DeMartino, LCSW

Executive Director, NASW-MD