

Testimony of the Alzheimer's Association Greater Maryland and National Capital Area Chapters
HB 0216 - Washington County - Nursing Homes and Assisted Living Programs - Essential Caregivers
Position: Unfavorable

Chair Pendergrass and Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk,

The Alzheimer's Association writes today in respectful opposition to HB 216, legislation which requires each nursing home and assisted living program in Washington County to establish policies and procedures authorizing indoor visitation from an essential caregiver; establishes the duties and authority of essential caregivers; and authorizes the nursing homes and assisted living programs to restrict or revoke essential caregiver status under certain circumstances

Amidst the ongoing conversation about indoor visitation at nursing homes and assisted living facilities (particularly during a public health emergency), we are concerned about a potential "essential caregiver" category of visitors. This designation has had mixed results in jurisdictions where it has been adopted; for example, Minnesota introduced it in July 2020 without adequate regulations to protect the health and safety of individuals at nursing homes and assisted living facilities, and there was a spike in COVID-19 cases at these facilities three weeks later.

We additionally oppose this bill because we believe regulations should be set at a statewide level, and not specific to each jurisdiction. Standardized, statewide guidelines are necessary so that caregivers are not usurping and interfering with the role of trained, experienced staff.

If this provision was to move forward, we would encourage that clear, statewide guidelines are established to guide what essential caregivers should be doing. Essential caregivers should be a complement—and not a substitute—for trained, employed staff at nursing homes or assisted living facilities. Staff, and not family caregivers, should be responsible to assist with activities of daily living inside care facilities.

We respectfully applaud the intention of this legislation. We need more, educated, and better caregivers. We need to do more to address loneliness at long-term care facilities. But oppose this bill as written, and request an unfavorable report.