

Testimony Before the House Health and Government Operations Committee

House Bill 981 Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Personal Care Aides – Reimbursement and Required Wage

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 981 Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Personal Care Aides – Reimbursement and Required Wage.

As social workers, we are in favor of this bill because it strengthens the workforce that cares for vulnerable older adults and persons with disabilities. The bill requires the Maryland Medical Assistance Program to increase their reimbursement rates for long-term services and supports, and for provider agencies to provide a specific minimum wage to 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. 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. This wage increase would decrease the need for care aides to rely on government programs such as SNAP and Medicaid to meet their own needs.

Currently, older Marylanders and Marylanders with disabilities rely on personal care aides to receive necessary daily care with tasks such as bathing, grooming, and dressing. Assistance with these tasks often allows them 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.

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. We ask that you give a favorable report on House Bill 981.

Respectfully,

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