

Testimony of the Alzheimer's Association Greater Maryland and National Capital Area Chapters
HB 0166 - Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia - Council and Coordination of Services (Dementia Services Act of 2022)

Position: Favorable

Chair Pendergrass and Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk,

My name is David McShea and I am the Executive Director of the Alzheimer's Association's Greater Maryland chapter. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today—my first time before the Maryland General Assembly in my current capacity as Executive Director—in support of HB 166, legislation which at its core, creates and provides funding for a Director of Dementia Services Coordination at the Maryland Department of Health.

Since I began at the Association, nearly 18 months ago, I have emphasized the need for our organization to urgently reach Marylanders with Alzheimer's and their caregivers statewide. I am grateful, therefore, that this committee passed legislation last session to help us build awareness about dementia, and also for the Vice-Chair's new law which will help communicate disparities associated with dementia.

As we move forward in the 2022 Session, the legislation before you today is essential. The Virginia I. Jones Alzheimer's Disease Council is wrapping up its work, and I hope will soon have the opportunity to present its expansive plan to you. This legislation, if enacted, will help implement that plan and build the infrastructure for Alzheimer's support across our state. Which we do not have now.

The infrastructure to reach and aid Marylanders with dementia exists in certain Maryland counties. For example, in Prince George's County, the local government has been awarded a federal Dementia Capable Grant, to provide support for caregivers of people living with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. This county will take steps including: training more than 200 caregivers, establishing a 24/7 protocol for its hotline; and implementing education, outreach and referral programs. And in other areas—like Montgomery and Baltimore County—they have staff who engage community members with dementia and their loved ones.

Across Maryland's 24 local jurisdictions, however, these counties are the exception and not the rule when it comes to aiding the over 110,000 Marylanders living with dementia and their caregivers. Our state spent over \$1.2 billion in Medicaid dollars on this chronic disease in 2020, and yet there is not one person in our state government solely focused on dementia. The result of a lack of statewide investment in dementia is compounding; Maryland, in turn, is missing out on grant opportunities such as CDC's BOLD grant to help build out Alzheimer's services. All told, CDC has awarded these six-figure, multi-year grants to jurisdictions in over half of the country, Prince George's County has received a federal grant, but the Maryland Department of Health has not received dementia-specific funding.

We must build the infrastructure to address Alzheimer's and other dementia across our state. Our chapter of the Alzheimer's Association is pleased to do whatever we can to aid Marylanders, particularly during the pandemic. We offer educational programs, family care consultations, and support groups. Yet, as the years of work of the State Council lay out, there is a more comprehensive effort needed to help Marylanders. We see how a statewide approach helps in the work of George Worthington, Virginia's Dementia Services Coordinator. We see it in the work of Tihitina Chamiso, the District of Columbia's Dementia Services Coordinator at the DC Health Department, who—just one and a half years in—is launching a public awareness campaign and a website where dementia services can be found across the District's eight wards. It is time for Maryland to join Virginia, the District, and 13 other states who have this role, so we can better aid some of our most vulnerable residents.

I urge a favorable report on this legislation.