

Testimony of the Alzheimer's Association Greater Maryland and National Capital Area Chapters
**HB 981: Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Personal Care Aides - Reimbursement and
Required Wage**
Position: Favorable

Chair Pendergrass and Vice-Chair Pena-Melnyk,

My name is Eric Colchamiro, and I am Director of Government Affairs for the Alzheimer's Association in Maryland. Thank you for the opportunity to be before you here today on House Bill 981, which requires the Maryland Medical Assistance Program to increase the reimbursement rate for home care aides by 15 percent on or before July 1, 2023 and requires a provider agency to pay to certain personal care aides a wage rate of at least \$16 per hour on or before July 1, 2023.

The Maryland National Capital Home Care Association (or MNCHA) has been a longtime ally of Marylanders with Alzheimer's and other dementias. MNCHA serves on the Virginia I. Jones Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Council. We were grateful that this Committee passed Chapter 487 of 2021, with MNCHA's support, which requires annual and continuing education on dementia for all home care providers who work with individuals who have this cruel disease and their caregivers. And I want to acknowledge Dawn Seek, who recently stepped down as Executive Director of MNCHA, for her many years as an active participant in policy conversations about how we can improve care.

The bill under consideration today is a rate increase. It is a 15 percent rate increase for these invaluable providers, who organize staff to go into our homes and help seniors age in place. Amidst the pandemic, where nursing homes and to a lesser extent the assisted living industry received millions in state and federal government aid, these long-term care providers also deserve added support. Amidst the many thousands on Maryland's HCBS waiting list, these providers keep our loved ones in our communities, avoiding more costly institutional care.

This is also a bill that helps our direct care workforce. And my goodness, that is important.

- They aid individuals with dementia -- 95 percent of whom have at least one other chronic condition and whose care is complicated;
- There is a shortage of them overall, as our population ages -- by 2030, 3.4 million more direct care workers will be needed, a 48 percent increase from 2015;
- And yet the median wage for all the state's home health and personal care aides is just \$13.51 – and it is likely even less for Medicaid-funded workers.

I will close with this. The fiscal note outlines a high cost. We may even hear from industry that they want the cost to be higher, in order to pay their workers \$16 per hour; this would be on top of the annual four percent rate adjustment they are receiving through 2026, and on top of the additional one-time 5.2 percent rate increase home care providers are receiving from the American Rescue Plan Act.

Yet what about this workforce? The workforce – 90 percent of whom are women, and 70 percent of whom are Black, and many of whom do not have a college education. This is the workforce that cares for our seniors with Alzheimer's, including when they begin to lose the ability to speak. This is the workforce who has not been talked about enough, during the pandemic, when we discuss health care heroes. We need to value them; not just by acknowledging the workforce shortage, or talking about staffing costs, but by realizing that we do right by them—and our loved ones they care for—by paying them a living wage.