

Testimony in Support of HB 166 “Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia - Council and Coordination of Services (Dementia Services Act of 2022).”

Maryland House Health and Government Operations Committee
For February 3, 2022

FAVORABLE

TO: Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk, and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee

FROM: Ilyse Veron

My name is Ilyse Veron, and I am a resident of Bethesda MD.

I am submitting this testimony in support of SB 27, the Dementia Services Act of 2022, which at its core creates a Director of Dementia Services Coordination at the Maryland Department of Health.

Late in life one of my grandparents had dementia and for decades since he died my mother has been helping people living with dementia (PWDs) and their families, often conveying to me how challenging their journeys are. With a goal of reducing this complexity, and having seen firsthand in Maryland and captured stories of many elders with cognitive impairment of various stages, I currently work at a medtech company that has an FDA designated breakthrough, BrainSee, for early detection and monitoring of Alzheimer's disease.

I try to stay current on advanced tech and policy innovation. In its report, Scaling Comprehensive Dementia Care Models, the Alliance to Improve Dementia Care highlights six evidence-based, comprehensive dementia care models that include eight core elements of care. Care navigation is one of the most important of these eight elements -- to guide the person living with dementia and their caregiver to the services provided within the healthcare system and outside of clinical settings. Community-based organizations (CBOs) provide essential supportive services such as meal delivery, medication management, transportation, caregiver training, respite care, etc. For most persons living with dementia and their caregivers, navigating this fragmented care system adds to the significant stress of the care journey.

The Dementia Services Act of 2022 would, at its core, establish and mandate funding for a full-time Director of Dementia Services Coordination at the Maryland Department of Health. The position will be responsible for the coordination of services affecting Marylanders with dementia and their caregivers and families, including: implementing the Maryland Alzheimer's state plan managing the Virginia I. Jones Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Council; identifying and supporting the development of dementia-specific training; and applying for grants to expand and improve services for Marylanders with Alzheimer's and their caregivers.

There is precedent for this position; if enacted, Maryland's point person on dementia would join similar roles in 16 other states, including Virginia and the District of Columbia. This role would work, across government, to aid the 110,000 Marylanders with dementia and their loved ones. Our state spends over \$1.2 billion in Medicaid funding on this chronic disease; it is essential that we begin to build our infrastructure to help Marylanders in need.

The potential for this legislation is significant, in how it can help Marylanders. We can look just to the District of Columbia, where DC Health dementia coordinator Tihitina Chamiso is doing significant work including: convening a multi-stakeholder committee to build awareness about their work; re-drafting the District's State Plan on Alzheimer's and Related Dementia; starting a healthy brain website; and launching a public awareness campaign about their work. Maryland can do all of this too, if we devote the resources and build the infrastructure to address dementia.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB 27. We spend over a billion dollars on this disease, and it is time for Maryland to have a point person specifically working to end Alzheimer's and other dementia.

Thank you,

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