



**Testimony SB 511
Finance Committee
February 22, 2023
Position: FAVORABLE**

Dear Chairman Griffith and Members of the Finance Committee:

The Community Development Network of Maryland (CDN) is the voice for Maryland's community development sector and serves nearly 200 member organizations. CDN—focuses on small affordable housing developers, housing counseling agencies and community-based non-profits across the state of Maryland. The mission of CDN is to promote, strengthen and advocate for the community development sector throughout Maryland's urban, suburban and rural communities. CDN envisions a state in which all neighborhoods are thriving and where people of all incomes have abundant opportunities for themselves and their families.

SB 511 – Establishes the Rural Nonemergency Medical Transportation Program for hospitals to coordinate transportation provided by a nonprofit organization to or from medical services for eligible individuals; repealing a certain cap on the amount of grants that may be awarded by the Maryland Transit Administration under the Maryland Senior Rides Program; requiring the Governor to provide \$1,000,000 annually for the Rural Nonemergency Medical Transportation Program in the State budget.

in Calvert and St Mary's counties . Wheels to Wellness has travelled up to 20,000 miles per year since 2018, assisting those in mostly rural areas who cannot provide their own transportation to health service appointments. The Wheels to Wellness program provides transportation to seniors and individuals with disabilities. Each ride given to an individual provides them with medical care that they would have otherwise gone without. As a result, these individuals are able to address health related issues that they otherwise would have had to leave unchecked, resulting in worsening health conditions. Most of the areas served are rural areas. Individuals in rural areas tend to have less access to health care facilities, specifically specialty care, and in return have worst health than those in urban and suburban areas

For example, CalvertHealth completed a pre-post analysis of the program visits and charges for unique patients enrolled in the Wheels to Wellness program. The preliminary findings demonstrate significant savings particularly for emergency room, intensive care, laboratory, and medical hospital charges. The analysis also determined a significant increase in drug charges, which indicates enrollees may be improving their medical regime maintenance.

From October 4, 2019 to January 28, 2021. The CRISP data evaluates patients with a CalvertHealth Medical Center MRN and does not include patients referred to the program by some of the primary care offices. The patients are enrolled in the hospital case management program which includes Wheels to Wellness. CalvertHealth indicated that the number of ED visits dropped from 68 visits to 44 for the 23 members. The analysis by CalvertHealth indicate the medical/surgical costs dropped from \$238,844 to approximately \$49,233. The analysis by CalvertHealth indicate the Laboratory charges dropped from \$112,902 to \$31,336

Rural health disparities and racial and ethnic health disparities are well documented. Although the specific health challenges may vary, many are the same, such as higher rates of chronic conditions. Similar to communities of color, rural communities experience higher poverty and unemployment rates (US Department of Agriculture 2018) and have lower college enrollment rates despite having a higher high school graduation rate (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center 2016). Rural communities also face food insecurity.

Transportation to medical appointments provided by community based nonprofits is one way to address the health disparities that exist for older adults and people of color throughout Maryland.

We respectfully request a favorable report for SB 511.

Submitted by Claudia Wilson Randall, Executive Director