

Testimony of the Alzheimer's Association Greater Maryland and National Capital Area Chapters
**SB 604 - Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Provider Agencies and Personal Care Aides -
Reimbursement and Wages**
Position: Favorable

Chair Griffith and Vice Chair Klausmeier,

The Alzheimer's Association – representing the over 110,000 Marylanders with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia, along with their caregivers – is here today in strong support of Senate Bill 604, which requires the Maryland Department of Health to increase the hourly reimbursement rate for certain personal assistance services under the Maryland Medical Assistance Program to a minimum of \$25 per hour; requires provider agencies to pay the greater of \$16 per hour or 64% of the reimbursement rate to personal care aides and to provide a written notice regarding the wage to personal care aides; and requiring provider agencies to submit annual cost reports to the Department.

Alzheimer's, the most common form of dementia, is a disease that gets progressively worse over time. It is typically characterized by three stages. In the early stage, symptoms include trouble with planning, coming up with the right word or name, or having difficulty performing tasks at work or in social settings. In the moderate stage, people with dementia can start to withdraw, or often feel moody. They have trouble getting dressed. And as it progresses to the late stage, people can have difficulty communicating and eating, and require around the clock care. It becomes an extraordinary challenge for dementia caregivers, which wears on their mental and physical health. And at some point, frankly, it becomes too much for just them – and they require a home health aide to assist with their loved ones.

These aides, what we often call the direct care workforce, are an essential part of our care eco-system. Yet, as testimony indicates, there are not enough of them and they are not getting paid enough. This bill works at this problem; we can not simply increase the wages, we need to make sure that these funds are getting to workers so that they stay in the industry and people can get helped. So the cost reports this legislation mandates – while it may seem onerous, while it may be onerous – they are an essential compliance mechanism for this industry.

This bill provides a fair solution to help this problem. And it is necessary; to help people living with Alzheimer's and dementia, to help this workforce, and to help elevate the quality of care provided. I urge a favorable report.