



House Health & Government Operations Committee
House Bill 774 - Assisted Living Programs - Unlicensed Programs – Resident Abuse and Neglect
March 9, 2023
SUPPORT

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Maryland Chapter (NASW-MD), we would like to express our support for HB 774 Assisted Living Programs – Unlicensed Programs – Resident Abuse and Neglect.

As social workers who work with older adults, we know that thousands of vulnerable Marylanders rely on assisted living facilities (ALFs) to meet their daily needs. Sadly, many of them live in unlicensed facilities which have no oversight, poorly trained staff, and dangerous conditions. Too often these residents are subjected to abuse and neglect. Examples include adults with brain injuries, mental illness, or dementia who languish in their rooms without stimulation or support from staff, and elders with physical disabilities who do not receive the care they need for basic activities of daily living, thus exacerbating their disabilities.

Financial exploitation of residents is also widespread in unlicensed homes. We know that victims rarely report such abuse and neglect due to fear of retaliation, shame and embarrassment, dependency on their abusers, and inability to report due to physical or cognitive limitations.

While abuse and neglect can occur in any residential setting, unlicensed homes are particularly dangerous because they are hidden from public view, with no regulation or oversight. In 2022, the Attorney General’s Office investigated and prosecuted felony charges of theft, abuse, and neglect against of an operator of several unlicensed ALFs. The Attorney General’s investigation revealed financial exploitation of the disabled residents, as well as overcrowded and deplorable living conditions, with rodent and insect infestations. The convictions that were secured in this case represent the tip of the iceberg.

This bill would provide much stronger action to secure the safety of ALF residents. It would require the Department of Health to investigate for abuse and neglect whenever they become aware of an unlicensed assisted living facility and would subject abusive operators to immediate prosecution. These steps are critical to the well-being of vulnerable older adults who rely on ALFs for their care.

As the number of older Marylanders continues to grow, it is critical that we ensure that the most vulnerable among us can be cared for with safety, dignity, and autonomy.

For these reasons, we urge you to vote yes on HB 774.

Respectfully,

Mary Beth DeMartino, LCSW
Executive Director, NASW-MD