

Testimony of the Alzheimer's Association Greater Maryland and National Capital Area Chapters
HB 489 - Residential Service Agencies - Reimbursement - Personal Assistance Services
Position: Favorable

Chair Pena-Melnyk,

The Alzheimer's Association – representing the over 110,000 Marylanders with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia, along with their caregivers – submits this written testimony in strong support of House Bill 489, which authorizes the Maryland Department of Health to reimburse a residential service agency for personal assistance services only if the personal assistance services are provided by an individual classified as an employee.

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 there are too many home care agencies, which employ them, who refer to them as “independent contractors”. And that hurts everyone. It cuts the workers out of benefits. It discourages people to stay in this essential workforce. And it disadvantages the many honest residential service agencies—who provide their workers a living wage and benefits—by allowing their competitors to cut costs, and make more money, on the back of this essential workforce.

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. If you have any questions, please contact Alzheimer's Association Director of Government Affairs Eric Colchamiro at ercolchamiro@alz.org.