

Testimony of the Alzheimer's Association Greater Maryland and National Capital Area Chapters
HB 490 - Residential Service Agencies - Employee Registry
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 – is here today in support of House Bill 490, which requires the Maryland Department of Health to establish and maintain a registry of each employee of a residential service agency who provides home health care; requires each residential service agency to submit certain information to the Department; and requires the Department to disclose certain information to a labor union or similar employee organization on request. We also support the sponsor amendments to this legislation.

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.

The Home Care industry, also known as residential service agencies (or RSAs), is vital for Maryland. There are also a lot of them; as of July 1, 2021, OHCQ reports that there are 1605 licensed RSAs in our state which help some of our most vulnerable, including those with Alzheimer's and other dementia. Yet unlike assisted living facilities and unlike skilled nursing facilities—who help our seniors in need—RSAs are no longer required to have an annual inspection. OHCQ only truly ensures quality about these providers when they open up, or when someone makes the time to complain about them. There are limited other mechanisms to ensure the quality of the care they provide, or how they treat their workforce, who provides essential care.

Let us change that, and help our most vulnerable Marylanders. I ask for a favorable report.