

House Judiciary Committee
Senate Bill 797 - Task Force on Preventing and Countering Elder Abuse
March 22, 2023
SUPPORT

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Maryland Chapter (NASW-MD) Committee on Aging, we would like to express our support for Senate Bill 797 - Task Force on Preventing and Countering Elder Abuse.

As social workers who serve older adults, we know that elder abuse is a hidden epidemic. One in ten older adults falls victim to physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, or financial exploitation, yet fewer than one in 24 cases is ever disclosed to authorities. Elder abuse occurs among all social, cultural, and economic groups in Maryland. Sixty-six percent of elder abuse is committed by family members. In addition, neighbors, friends, caregiving staff and even strangers often take advantage of the vulnerabilities of older people to gain power and control over them and cause great harm. Victims of elder abuse often lose their health, their homes and sometimes their lives.

The pervasive problem of elder abuse needs to be addressed in a holistic and coordinated way. Current efforts to prevent and intervene are siloed, with Adult Protective Services playing the largest role in investigating cases and offering services. Other entities that help victims include the Departments of Aging and Health, law enforcement, public and private attorneys, and nonprofit agencies. What is lacking is a comprehensive approach to elder abuse. This approach should include a review of current laws and regulations related to elder abuse, widespread education of professionals and lay people, and a robust system of response to help victims regain their safety and autonomy.

This bill will enable all these stakeholders to work together to examine the problem and develop comprehensive solutions. It is critical that the task force examine the funding and workforce issues that limit our current response to elder abuse. In our view, the task force must recommend increased fiscal and human resources to prevent abuse and support victims. Older Marylanders have contributed so much to our great state. They deserve to live in safety and dignity. That is why we ask for a favorable report on SB 797.

Respectfully,

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