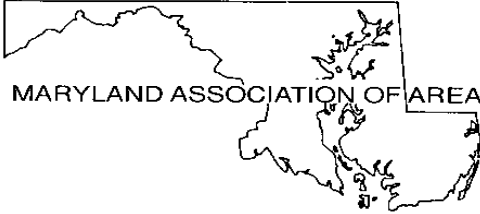


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Department of Aging and Disabilities

Health & Government Operations Committee – Bill Hearing March 28, 2024

Legislation: SB 952 Assisted Living Programs - Assisted Living Referrers - Requirements and Prohibitions

Position: Support

The nineteen member organizations of the Maryland Association of Area Agencies on Aging (M4A) serve Maryland's older and disabled citizens, providing a range of cost-effective state, federal and locally funded programs that help individuals remain secure in the community with dignity, independence, and choice as they age. M4A and its associated Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) represent the "front line" in Maryland's challenge to meet the complex and varied needs of well over 1 million older adults statewide. M4A's goal is to ensure communication and collaboration with all partners to maximize the resources available to those we serve.

M4A supports Senate Bill 952 as we believe it will add protections for vulnerable adults who need care in assisted living facilities. In addition, we believe this bill will provide caregivers and care recipients with better supports and greater transparency when selecting a facility with the guidance of a referral service.

The decision to seek placement in an Assisted Living is a difficult one for most individuals and their families. This most often occurs at a time of high stress, when caregivers are overwhelmed and desperate for professional expertise so that they can make the very best decision for their loved ones. This is why it is critical that professional, for profit referral agencies be held to a very high standard of professionalism and integrity. Not all referral agencies function with the same standard of ethics and transparency and this can leave families and care recipients in compromised, even dangerous situations.

As the local resource for aging and disability resources, AAA offices receive phone calls from families who have, in good faith, acted upon placement guidance from referral agencies and have found themselves in very problematic situations. This includes placement in non-licensed care facilities, facilities ill-suited to the needs of their loved ones, and facilities with substandard care. Families are often unaware that referral services generally have contracts with facilities to drive placements and fill beds in the facilities with which they have contracts. Often the contractual

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arrangements become the priority and the needs of the individual are lost. In addition, some families have found that their information is sold and they are subjected to a barrage of unwanted, sometimes aggressive marketing and/or scams.

There are many detrimental outcomes of an inappropriate placement but the turbulence and upset caused to an already vulnerable care recipient can be catastrophic. Arranging new placement can be time consuming, expensive and extremely stressful for families who expected professional, unbiased expertise from their referral services.

For the reasons stated herein, M4A supports SB 952's effort to create standard requirements and procedures for referral organizations.