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HB 1253 Health Care Facilities - Access to Telephones
House Health and Government Operations Committee
FAVORABLE
March 13, 2024

Good afternoon, Chair Peña-Melnyk and members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee. I am Tammy Bresnahan, Senior Director of Advocacy for AARP Maryland. AARP Maryland advocates on behalf of two million Marylanders age 50 and over. AARP Maryland supports HB 1253. We thank Delegate Metzgar for introducing this very important bill.

HB 1253 requires, on or before January 1, 2025, certain health care facilities to implement a program to provide individuals admitted to the health care facility reasonable access to a telephone.

Currently Maryland regulations require certain access to a telephone for individuals in certain institutions. Residents of a residential treatment center have the right to make and receive telephone calls in accordance with the center's policy (COMAR 10.07.04.22). Limited private inpatient facilities must have a telephone in the residence where residents can make calls and speak privately (COMAR 10.07.16.12). A resident of an assisted living program has the right to have reasonable access to the private use of a common use telephone within the facility (COMAR 10.07.14.35). Regulations further specify the number and location of telephones is determined by the licensed capacity of the assisted living facility. Patients residing in a hospice house have the right to have reasonable access to the private use of a telephone within the facility (COMAR 10.07.22.16).

Nursing Homes

Currently Maryland regulations (COMAR 10.07.09.08) also require a resident of nursing facility has the right to reasonable access to the private use of a telephone. Each resident of a comprehensive care facility or an extended care facility must have access at any reasonable time to a telephone where the resident may speak privately.

While we know COMAR requires reasonable access to the private use of a telephone, we have heard from family and residents, this may not/is not happening. New and older residents should be informed of their right to have private access to a phone. This should continue and should be advertised if applicable.

For these reasons we ask the House Health and Government Operations Committee for a favorable report on HB 1253. For questions or follow up, please contact me at tbresnahan@aarp.org or by calling 410302-8451.