

SB 376 – Janice Zalen FAVORABLE

Health Facilities - Delegation of Inspection Authority - Nursing Homes

TO: Chair Pamela Beidle, Co-Chair Antonio Hayes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee

FROM: Janice Zalen

My name is Janice Zalen. I am a resident of District 20. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB 376, Health Facilities - Delegation of Inspection Authority - Nursing Homes.

I am a private citizen with a strong background in SB 376's subject area. I worked in a trade association that represents nursing facilities for 15 years. Upon retirement, I was a Certified Long Term Care Ombudsman Volunteer for 8 years. I have been involved with nursing facilities, professionally and as a volunteer, for enough years to understand the importance of government oversight to ensure that residents of nursing facilities are cared for properly. These individuals are the State's most vulnerable citizens. Government oversight that ensures that residents are in a safe environment and receiving care that meets regulatory standards is crucial. A Federal mandate requires States to conduct annual inspections and also to conduct complaint investigations. And yet, for reasons that are incomprehensible to me, the State of Maryland fails to abide by this Federal mandate and thus, the State endangers its residents of nursing facilities.

SB 376 would allow the State to delegate its nursing home inspection authority to County government. The State did, in fact, delegate its responsibilities to Montgomery County for ten years during which time, the County performed admirably. I know this because I was a Long Term Care Ombudsman during that time. I saw the County surveyors conduct annual inspections. I saw the nursing facility improve when the County surveyors cited deficiencies. I saw the quality of life and the quality of care improve for the residents after a survey. I also saw County surveyors diligently conduct on-site complaint investigations. Also important, when I was aware of a serious problem, the nursing facility administrator would work with me for a solution because they did not want the issue to rise to the level of a complaint to the Government. Today there is no such motivation as the State rarely follows up on complaints.

To conclude, I strongly support this bill because for the last several years, the State of Maryland has ignored its oversight obligations to the detriment of fragile and vulnerable nursing facility residents. The need to resolve this issue is urgent. Allowing County governments to take on oversight responsibilities is a solid solution.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB 376.