



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

January 21, 2025

Finance Committee  
Chair Senator Pamela Beidle  
Vice Chair Senator Antonio Hayes  
3 Miller East Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

To the Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Finance Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to testify on Senate Bill 69, Maryland Department of Health - Access to Telephones – Study.

This bill will require the Maryland Department of Health to conduct a study to determine the feasibility of each resident having access to a phone who are patients in psychiatric and assisted living facilities and nursing homes. The study will assess the potential cost of installing and maintaining telephone systems in these facilities, including but not limited to labor, equipment, and installation.

The study will also investigate the benefits of patients having access to telephones including but not limited to social interaction and access to support services, such as attorneys, personal physicians, and social workers.

The study will include interested parties such as representatives from assisted living facilities, psychiatric facilities, and nursing homes; advocacy organizations for seniors, individuals with disabilities, 10 and individuals with mental health illnesses; and residents and their families.

Current Federal and State code dictate that a patient in a long-term care facility must have reasonable rights to telephone access. Certain stipulations only guarantee a minimum of two common use phones throughout the facility for all the residents to use. This does not guarantee that every resident will have access to use a telephone every day, nor does it guarantee the privacy promised in the Resident's Bill of Rights.

State code also says that a resident is only guaranteed a phone jack and adequate wiring for a direct land line in their room. The physical phone itself must be provided by the patient or their family. In critical situations, a landline provides reliable communication during emergencies, so they may easily reach out to medical staff, security, or other emergency services.

A landline in patient rooms will help maintain confidential communication between patients and their caregivers or health care providers. It would also improve the overall quality of patient care which can contribute to positive experiences for patients in medical facilities.

I have had a discussion with representatives from the Department of Health and am happy to add any amendments they deem necessary to reduce the fiscal note, such as eliminating psychiatric care facilities from the bill, or turning the study into a work group. I am currently waiting on their input, which is why I have not made amendments to the bill yet.

I appreciate your time and the opportunity to testify on this matter, and I respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 69.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in red ink, appearing to read "Johnny Ray Salling", is positioned above the printed name.

Senator Johnny Ray Salling