

**Testimony before the House Health & Government Operations Committee  
February 21, 2025**

**House Bill 1070: Maryland Department of Health - Access to Telephones – Study**

**\*\*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 House Bill 1070 - Maryland Department of Health – Access to Telephones – Study. As social workers, we are in support of this bill because it addresses communication for those in assisted living facilities, psychiatric facilities, and nursing homes. Having access to a support network outside of these facilities can make a big difference in a resident's stay.

We recognize having available phones might present challenges in some settings. Even in assisted living facilities and nursing homes, residents with dementia have been known to call 911, a number they may remember, in an attempt to get help when they do not remember where they are or why they are there. HB 1070 would require a feasibility study to look at the issue of maintaining landline telephone systems. One option may not work for all three of these types of facilities.

For nursing homes, the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 42 – Requirements for States and Long-Term Care Facilities (483.10) reads “the facility must protect and facilitate the resident's rights to communicate with individuals and entities within and external to the facility, including TTY and TDD services.” The regulations also state that residents should have a place where telephone calls can be made, without being heard. This does not always happen. Cell phones have replaced many landlines and are allowed at the resident's expense but may not be accessible to all older adults. Cell phones can be difficult to maintain in nursing homes because they need to be charged and can be misplaced. Some families have been advised to keep the resident's cell phone at home, so it does not get lost.

Residents of these facilities need access to those who are important to them. And family and friends need to be able to talk to their loved ones. We saw the importance of communication during the COVID epidemic when visits were not possible. Staying engaged with those who are important to us is a crucial part of addressing loneliness and feelings of isolation.

*(over)*

A feasibility study would allow the Maryland Department of Health to examine the existing availability of telephone accessibility, research technology available (something changing all the time) and consult with stakeholders. Then the study's recommendations can help formulate a plan moving forward that would address the importance of communication for all residents.

We ask that you support HB 1070.

Respectfully,

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