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HB 1070 Maryland Department of Health - Access to Telephones - Study
House Health and Government Operations Committee
February 21, 2025
FAVORABLE

Good afternoon, Chair Peña-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee. My name is Tammy Bresnahan, and I am the Senior Director of Advocacy for AARP Maryland. On behalf of our more than 850,000 members across the state, AARP strongly supports HB 1070 – Maryland Department of Health - Access to Telephones – Study.

This legislation is critical to ensuring that older Marylanders living in assisted living facilities, psychiatric facilities, and nursing homes have reliable access to telephone communication. We sincerely thank Delegate Woorman for introducing this important bill.

AARP Maryland is committed to protecting the rights, dignity, and well-being of older residents, particularly those in vulnerable situations. We work closely with state leaders, community organizations, and stakeholders to ensure older Marylanders receive safe, high-quality care and are treated with respect. Through advocacy, education, and outreach, we support stronger regulations and oversight to prevent abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Our mission is clear: to make Maryland a state where older adults can live with peace of mind, knowing their safety and well-being are prioritized.

For older adults, particularly those in long-term care settings, access to a landline telephone is not a luxury—it is a necessity. Many older Marylanders experience mobility challenges, hearing impairments, or cognitive issues that make cell phones difficult or impractical to use. Landlines offer a stable, accessible, and reliable way for residents to stay connected with family, caregivers, and essential services. Unlike cell phones, landlines do not rely on battery power or strong cellular signals, making them a critical lifeline during emergencies or power outages.

AARP policy strongly supports measures that expand communication access for older adults, particularly those in institutional settings. The ability to make and receive phone calls is essential for reducing social isolation and maintaining mental well-being. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the devastating effects of isolation, reinforcing the need for proactive solutions to keep long-term care residents connected with their loved ones.

HB 1070 directs the Maryland Department of Health to study the feasibility of installing and maintaining landline telephone systems in these facilities. This study is an important first step toward ensuring that older Marylanders have consistent and equitable access to communication.

By providing reliable phone service, we can improve quality of life, ensure access to critical resources, and support the dignity and independence of older adults.

For these reasons, AARP Maryland respectfully urges a favorable report on HB 1070. Thank you for your time and consideration.