



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB 141: Task Force on Loneliness and Isolation

Health and Governmental Operations Committee

Wednesday, January 29, 2025 - 1:00PM

Chair Peña-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee,

Loneliness and social isolation are not just personal challenges; they represent a pressing public health crisis with profound societal and economic consequences. Former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek H. Murthy warned of this emergent public health crisis:

“Loneliness is far more than just a bad feeling—it harms both individual and societal health. It is associated with a greater risk of cardiovascular disease, dementia, stroke, depression, anxiety, and premature death. The mortality impact of being socially disconnected is similar to that caused by smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day, and even greater than that associated with obesity and physical inactivity. And the harmful consequences of a society that lacks social connection can be felt in our schools, workplaces, and civic organizations, where performance, productivity, and engagement are diminished.” – **Former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek H. Murthy**

Chronic loneliness is linked to higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide. Research estimates that social isolation among older adults costs the healthcare system billions annually due to increased hospitalizations and prolonged nursing facility stays. Furthermore, workplace absenteeism driven by loneliness results in significant productivity losses, impacting businesses and the economy of our state.

Among older adults, loneliness contributes to cognitive decline and dementia, while younger populations report heightened levels of social disconnection, exacerbated by excessive screen time and reduced face-to-face interactions. Economic costs are equally concerning. Maryland has an opportunity to lead by example in the United States, alongside Connecticut which passed similar legislation.

While the conditions which lead to chronic loneliness and social isolation vary from person to person, it is clear this is a systemic issue that requires government intervention. Maryland can become a leader in advancing the policies needed to strengthen social connection and promote community.

The creation of the Maryland Task Force on the Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation will bring together leaders with diverse perspectives from across sectors to:

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1. **Identify Key Drivers:** Conducting comprehensive research to understand the social, economic, and cultural factors contributing to loneliness in Maryland.
2. **Recommend Interventions:** Proposing evidence-based solutions tailored to specific populations, such as older adults, rural and urban communities, young people, and individuals with disabilities.

The timing of this initiative is particularly critical. The lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated feelings of disconnection and isolation, making it more urgent than ever to act. This Task Force will not only address immediate needs but also lay the groundwork for long-term resilience and well-being in Maryland communities.

There is a sponsor amendment which expands the taskforce to include representation from psychologists, Veterans groups, aging Marylanders, and the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Coalition.

I urge the Committee to give a favorable report on HB 141.