



February 21, 2025

House Bill 1070

**Maryland Department of Health - Access to Telephones – Study
House Health and Government Operations Committee**

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals, and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

House Bill 1070 requires the Maryland Department of Health to study the feasibility of installing and maintaining a telephone system in assisted living facilities, psychiatric facilities, and nursing homes; and requiring the Maryland Department of Health to report its findings and recommendations to certain committees of the General Assembly by September 30, 2026.

This legislation highlights the importance of ensuring residents in nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and psychiatric hospitals have access to telephones. Many individuals in these settings, particularly the elderly, often lack private telephones, leaving them disproportionately affected by limited communication options. Telephones are essential tools for residents to maintain connections with healthcare providers, family members, and friends—especially for those who lack private transportation or are geographically distant from loved ones. Access to telephones is not just a matter of convenience; it is critical for mental health and emotional well-being. Social connections fostered through regular communication have been shown to increase happiness, reduce loneliness, and promote mental resilience. For older residents, particularly those facing isolation, these interactions can dramatically improve their quality of life.

Landline telephones remain operational during power outages, ensuring that residents can access emergency services when needed.¹ Landlines are simpler and more familiar to older individuals compared to cell phones, reducing the need for facility staff to teach residents how to use modern devices. Around half of Maryland households aged 65 and older continue to use

¹ <https://www.adultalternativecare.com/elder-care-should-seniors-get-a-landline-again/#:~:text=Landline%20phones%20work%20in%20any,if%20there%20is%20no%20electricity.>

landlines, indicating the importance of this communication method among the elderly population.² If this study identifies gaps in telephone access across nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and psychiatric hospitals, the findings will provide critical recommendations for future legislation. Addressing these gaps is essential to ensure that vulnerable populations have the infrastructure they need for safety, connection, and independence.

For these reasons, the Maryland Catholic Conference asks for a favorable report on **HB 1070**.

Thank you for your consideration.

² <https://www.communityphone.org/landline/md>