

**Testimony before the House Health & Government Operations Committee
February 20, 2025**

**House Bill 828: Health Care Facilities - Rights of Comprehensive and Extended Care Facility
Residents - Hospice Comfort Care**

****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 828 - Rights of Comprehensive and Extended Care Facilities – Hospice Comfort Care. As social workers, we are in favor of this bill because it gives hospice residents, those who are at their end of life, more options to receive the care they might need.

Nursing homes and extended care facilities are the most regulated of our health care institutions. The rights of residents who reside in nursing homes are taken very seriously. Every staff member is tasked with being sure residents' rights are upheld. The right to be free from physical and chemical restraints is a long-standing right for residents in a nursing home. Social workers are glad this right is respected as restraints of any kind undermine freedom of choice and self—determination, important concerns for social workers.

Those residents on hospice care have a hospice care team that works closely with the facility staff. Some residents at end of life may experience terminal agitation. This can include distressed behavior, confusion, restlessness, pulling at clothing, bedsheets or IV's, and even personality changes. These symptoms are not only heartbreaking for a family to witness but make it difficult to implement hospice's goal of a comfortable, peaceful death.

When a hospice patient is agitated, the care team assesses the patient to rule out any reversible cause. Next, they look for any non-pharmacological management methods such as repositioning, music, gentle and reassuring talking, a gentle touch or massage. If necessary, it is reasonable to consider additional management techniques which might include a bedrail, Geri chair or sedative medications. These techniques currently violate resident rights to be free from physical and chemical restraints. Yet they may be an important part of providing end of life comfort care to a resident. Weighing risk versus benefit of all care decisions is important. These discussions should happen with the care team, family and the resident if possible. The use of a physical or chemical restraint would be ordered by a physician for those at their end of life.

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HB 828 would provide the exception to established nursing home resident rights that might make the difference for the resident and their family as the resident journeys through their end of life.

For these reasons, we ask that you give a favorable report on HB 828.

Respectfully,

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