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HB141 Task Force on Loneliness and Isolation
FAVORABLE
Health and Government Operations Committee
January 29, 2025

Good afternoon, Chair Pena-Melnyk and members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee. My name is Lois Meszaros. I am a licensed psychologist, a member of the AARP Maryland Volunteer Executive Council, and a proud resident of Anne Arundel County. On behalf of AARP Maryland and its members, I am here to express strong support for **HB141: Task Force on Loneliness and Isolation**. I also want to thank Delegate Vogel for sponsoring this vital legislation.

AARP is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to helping people achieve their goals, strengthening communities, and advocating for families on critical issues like healthcare, financial security, retirement planning, and more.

The United States Surgeon General has declared **loneliness and social isolation** an epidemic. While anyone can experience these challenges, older adults are particularly vulnerable. Although these issues predated the pandemic, COVID-19 greatly exacerbated them. According to the University of Michigan National Poll on Healthy Aging, in 2023:

- **1 in 3 adults aged 50–80** (34%) reported feeling isolated in the past year.
- More than **1 in 3 older adults** (37%) reported a lack of companionship.

The impact of loneliness on health is profound. Research shows that lacking social connection has the same negative health effects as smoking 15 cigarettes or drinking six alcoholic beverages daily. Having fewer than six close connections significantly decreases life expectancy.

Loneliness and social isolation are linked to serious mental and physical health risks, including:

- Increased risk of **Alzheimer's disease** and heart disease.
- Unexplained physical symptoms like **chronic pain and headaches**.
- Higher rates of **depression** and **anxiety**.

As a psychologist in Anne Arundel County, I witness the effects of these issues firsthand. Many older adults feel their world is shrinking—losing co-workers to retirement, friends moving away, or loved ones passing on. Health challenges can limit their mobility, while a lack of access to transportation and technology further isolates them.

AARP is so concerned about loneliness and isolation as we age, that the AARP Foundation created Connect2Affect. Connect2Affect is one tool in the toolbox, but AARP believes that we need to look at the causes of loneliness and isolation as a state. That is why AARP is supporting HB141. HB 141 would establish a Task Force to:

1. Evaluate the root causes of loneliness and isolation.
2. Develop strategies to prevent and alleviate these issues.
3. Recommend local activities, systems, and structures to combat this epidemic.

AARP believes researching loneliness and social isolation is critical because of the profound impact these issues have on aging Marylanders. Supporting research and initiatives like HB141, Marylanders will have the opportunity to stay connected and thrive as they age. For these reasons, AARP Maryland urges the Committee to issue a **Favorable report** on HB141. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Tammy Bresnahan at **tbresnahan@aarp.org** or **410-302-8451**.