

Sharon Duncan Jones-Eversley, DrPH, MA
Professor Emeritus -Social Epidemiologist
HB0868 General Assembly Written Testimony
Judiciary Committee

Scheduled February 27, 2025

Hello, I am Dr. Sharon Duncan Jones-Eversley. First and foremost, thank you for the opportunity to express my favorable endorsement of HB 868, Granny's Law. I am a lifelong Marylander who was born, raised, and educated in public schools in Baltimore City. My three higher education degrees are from Maryland institutions: Morgan State University and the University of Baltimore.

I am a Professor Emeritus and Social Epidemiologist in the Family Science Department at Towson University. Please note that my testimony today does not represent Towson University. Rather, it reflects my over 40 years in human services and public health.

As a health disparities scholar in the early 2000s, under the leadership of Dr. Carlessia Hussein, I conducted analytical data and research and authored four (4) reports for the Maryland Department of Health, Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities. Those reports guided the Maryland Plan to Eliminate Minority Health Disparities in our great state.

While Granny's Law primarily addresses the interpretation of wills, it has significant implications in Maryland and the nation as we are on the dawn of the largest intergenerational transfer of wealth (an estimated \$125 trillion) from older generations to their intended beneficiaries. Granny's Law provides essential safeguards to protect the true intentions of Maryland's elderly residents as they pass their wealth, assets, and legacies to future generations. Granny's Law also complements the Maryland Department of Aging's *Longevity Ready Maryland* initiatives to ensure a better quality of life and aging for all Marylanders, regardless of zip code, race, ethnicity, or other social demographics that contribute to variances in health care, health outcomes, and overall quality of life.

But more importantly, HB 868 aligns with the MD Code that addresses identifying and eliminating health disparities in Maryland. Persistent health disparities exist and remain among marginalized Marylanders ages 60 and older.

In Maryland, African Americans are 84% more likely than whites to be diabetic. They are also about 25% more likely to die from heart disease or stroke. Similar to national data, Maryland Black Americans die sicker and younger than any other race or ethnicity. Resulting in higher rates of chronic diseases (heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, etc.), adverse health outcomes, and mortality. However, when we stratify the data to Black aging Marylanders' low life expectancy (72.8) and poverty rate (16%) their quality of health and life data are even more disturbing.

While Maryland has made progress in addressing social determinants of health, we must elevate our efforts to target social determinants of death among our aging population, particularly those marginalized and the older Black population 60 and older.

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HB 868, "Granny's Law," is a much-needed, common-sense, equitable, and necessary update to Maryland's probate laws. It reflects our moral responsibility to honor the lives and legacies of Maryland's elderly and protect their final wishes from misinterpretation or exploitation.

I urge the committee to pass House Bill 868 to ensure Maryland's families can navigate the largest wealth transfer in history with dignity and justice.

Thank you for your time and consideration.