



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association

To the Senate Finance Committee

Chair Pamela Beidle

Feb 20, 2026

Senate Bill 555: Health- Dementia Services and Brain Health Program and Clinical Toolkit

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and members of the Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 555: Health - Dementia Services and Brain Health Program and Clinical Toolkit.

The MRHA supports the establishment of this program which seeks to improve dementia care in Maryland by advising on the ways that the State can support patients, caregivers, and providers while also promoting strategies that improve brain health amongst Maryland residents. This bill further aims to develop an evidence-based tool-kit to assist medical providers in delivering high quality dementia care.

More than 5.5 million people in the United States are currently living with dementia, and this number is projected to rise significantly in the coming years (1,2). Dementia accounts for over 100,000 deaths annually nationwide and is estimated to result in over \$781 billion dollars of medical costs in 2025 alone (1,2). The burden of dementia disproportionately affects individuals in rural communities, where socioeconomic factors, environmental exposures, and limited access to healthcare contribute to increased risk of cognitive decline (3). Additionally, the growing prevalence of dementia risk factors— obesity, hypertension, and diabetes— combined with the aging U.S. population has led researchers and public health experts to call for strengthened dementia care infrastructure and prevention strategies (1,2).

Understanding the profound emotional, physical, and financial impact of dementia on patients and caregivers, this bill leverages public health interventions to promote brain health and seeks to optimize dementia care delivery in a personalized, evidence-based fashion. As dementia increases in prevalence, it is critical to establish infrastructure to monitor, prevent, and effectively care for those impacted by this condition. As such, the MRHA urges your support of this bill.

With appreciation,

The Maryland Rural Health Association

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1. NIH National Institute of Health Risk and future burden of dementia in the United States Feb 18
2. NIH National Institute of Aging: NIA statement on the U.S. Cost of Dementia Model report April 25, 2025
3. Xie, Z., Hu, J., Stallings-Smith, S., Kulshreshtha, A., & Hong, Y. R. (2025). Rural-urban differences in modifiable dementia risk factors among U.S. populations aged 45 years or older. *Journal of Alzheimer's disease reports*, 9, 25424823251395318.