

Written Testimony in Support of SB 555

Submitted by: Cynthia D. Fields, MD

Constituent, District 42A

Dear Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and Members of the Finance Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of *SB 555 - Health - Dementia Services and Brain Health Program and Clinical Toolkit* which establishes the Dementia Services and Brain Health Program and requires the development of a statewide clinical dementia care toolkit.

My name is Dr. Cynthia Fields, and I am an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. I am also a member of the Virginia I. Jones Alzheimer's Disease and related Dementias Council. I offer this testimony in my personal capacity as a physician, and my views do not represent those of Johns Hopkins University or that of the Council.

I strongly urge you to support SB 555. This bill equips health care providers with practical tools to deliver timely, person-centered care, improve early detection and access to treatment, counsel patients on reducing dementia risk, and advance a statewide prevention strategy that supports care planning, reduces hospitalizations, delays unnecessary long-term care placement, and ultimately lowers future Medicaid and health care costs.

This issue is of the utmost importance to me. I am proud to say that I was born and raised in Baltimore City. I am also proud to say that I am a Hopkins-trained, Board Certified, Geriatric Neuropsychiatrist who has specialized in Alzheimer's disease and related dementias for over 15 years. I now serve the residents of Baltimore City and beyond. I have personally witnessed the ravages of dementia: it robs people of their independence and burdens their families with providing the needed care. With national estimates ranking both Maryland and Baltimore City as having the highest prevalence of Alzheimer's in the nation, there is much work to be done.

I would like to highlight two aspects of this bill that are particularly salient to my work as a clinician, educator, and researcher in this field.

We have a shortage of dementia-proficient clinicians in the state of Maryland. My colleagues and I have very long wait lists, and some are not accepting new patients at all. SB 555 will equip various healthcare providers, including those in primary care, with the practical tools they need to diagnose and treat dementia. Use of the Clinical Toolkit for Dementia Care will improve early detection and help these providers to deliver person-centered care, including advance planning. The toolkit will be evidence-based, up-to-date, and widely available.

We need to invest in preventive care for Alzheimer's disease and related dementias to make a true public health impact. While there are promising new treatments available for Alzheimer's disease, those treatments are costly, can be risky, and are not widely available. SB 555 will give health care providers the resources to counsel patients in early- to mid-life on ways to reduce their individual dementia risk. It will also establish statewide public health infrastructure to advance Maryland's long-term statewide prevention strategy, ultimately helping reduce dementia prevalence in Maryland.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to support this bill.

**Respectfully,
Cynthia D. Fields, MD
Constituent**