

Written Testimony in Support of SB 555

Submitted by: Tonya M Brown, M.Ed., M.S., Ed.D.

Constituent, District 13

Greetings Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and Members of the Committee:

I am Tonya M. Brown, a constituent in District 13. I urge you to support Senate Bill 555 — Dementia Services and Brain Health Program and Clinical Toolkit. This bill equips health care providers with 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, delay long-term care placement, and lower Medicaid and health care costs.

My most significant connection to Alzheimer's is my mother, who was diagnosed with early-stage Alzheimer's in January 2024 after a year-long battery of tests. After giving us the diagnosis, the neurologist stepped out to take a personal call, leaving us alone to absorb life-changing news. When he returned, I was told I had one year before I would need to move her, that I should not handle this alone, and I was given a resource book for Montgomery County residents, although she lives in Prince George's County. We left devastated and filled with anxiety.

Since then, navigating care has been extremely difficult — from medication complications, 4-6 month long waits for neurology appointments, and to sudden provider turnover. As my mother's primary caregiver and only child, I feel helpless and I have received little support from the medical system or community resources. I now pay nearly \$1,000 per month for part-time caregiving, at the expense of my own financial stability. If my mother had received an early, accurate diagnosis supported by proper counseling and care planning, we would have avoided delays, unnecessary costs, and overwhelming anxiety.

Part of what made our experience so difficult was that many providers simply lacked dementia-specific training — this bill creates the tools and clinical guidance they need. Early access to dementia-specific services would have made a meaningful difference for both my mother and I. Marylanders deserve a system that helps families navigate dementia with clarity, not confusion. SB 555 is the step we need to ensure dignity, support, and early intervention for every community in our state. I respectfully urge a favorable vote.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best regards,

Tonya M. Brown, M.Ed., M.S., Ed.D.