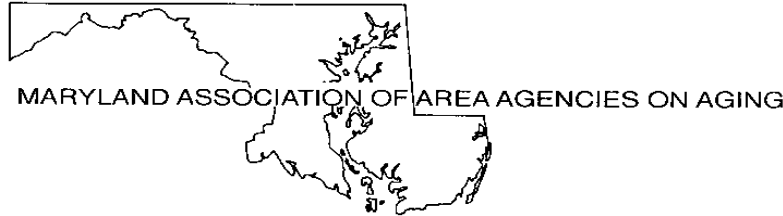


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BILL NO: Senate Bill 555
TITLE: Health-Dementia Services and Brain Health Program & Clinical Toolkit
COMMITTEE: Finance
POSITION: **SUPPORT**
DATE: February 24, 2026

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Maryland Association of Area Agencies on Aging (M4A), thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of Senate Bill 555, legislation that significantly strengthens Maryland's statewide approach to Alzheimer's disease, related dementias, and overall brain health. This bill represents an essential modernization of our public health infrastructure at a time when the prevalence of dementia continues to rise in Maryland and across the nation.

Senate Bill 555 establishes the Dementia Services and Brain Health Program within the Maryland Department of Health, shifting responsibility from a single director to a full program with expanded statutory duties. This transition recognizes the complexity and urgency of dementia-related issues in our State. The Program is designed to lead statewide public health efforts related to brain health and dementia, enhancing coordination, improving data sharing, and promoting evidence-based prevention and early detection strategies.

The bill empowers the Virginia I. Jones Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias Council's responsibilities update and advocate for a state plan that is correlated to the needs of those living with dementia and their caregivers while identifying efficiencies to reduce gaps in service across the state. The Council will also be tasked with examination of Maryland's capacity to deliver dementia-capable care and identifying ways the State can better support providers serving individuals at risk for or living with dementia. This added focus on provider readiness is critical as Maryland's aging population continues to grow.

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One of the most impactful components of Senate Bill 555 is the requirement that the Department of Health—working with the Department of Aging, the Council, and expert organizations—develop and maintain a Clinical Toolkit for Dementia Care by January 1, 2027. This toolkit will provide a centralized, up-to-date resource for all health care providers and will include:

- Risk factors and risk-reduction strategies
- Tools for early detection and validated cognitive assessments
- Guidance on person-centered care and clinical best practices
- Care planning resources and referral pathways
- Continuing education opportunities
- Information on racial and ethnic disparities in diagnosis and access to care

These resources are essential to ensuring that providers across all care settings—primary care, hospitals, health systems, nursing services, and others—can deliver high-quality, dementia-capable care.

Senate Bill 555 strengthens Maryland’s statewide plan implementation by requiring the Program to:

- Oversee State Plan activities
- Develop measurable outcomes
- Improve data-sharing and analysis
- Support partnerships across agencies and community organizations
- Promote dementia-specific training and education

These improvements will help Maryland reduce disparities, support caregivers, improve clinical outcomes, and build a more dementia-ready workforce.

Senate Bill 555 is a forward-looking, comprehensive public health measure that addresses one of the most significant aging-related challenges facing Maryland families today. By establishing a dedicated statewide Program, modernizing the Council’s duties, and creating a robust clinical toolkit, this legislation will improve care, enhance coordination, and promote brain health for all Marylanders.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 555.

Who is M4A?

The nineteen member organizations of Maryland’s Association of Area Agencies on Aging (M4A) serve Maryland’s older and citizens with disabilities, providing a range of cost-effective state, federal, and locally funded programs that help individuals remain secure in the community with dignity, independence, and choice as they age. M4A and its associated Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) represent the “front line” in Maryland’s challenge to meet the complex and varied needs of well over one million older adults statewide. M4A’s goal is to ensure coordination and communication with all partners on all aspects of senior service planning, thereby enhancing opportunities and availability to all eligible citizens.