



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA)

To the House Health Committee
Chair: Delegate Heather Bagnall
February 1, 2026

House Bill 0162: Department of Aging - Maryland Access Point - Dementia-Friendly Communities

POSITION: SUPPORT

Delegate Queen, Chair Bagnall, Vice Chair Cullison, and members of the Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of House Bill 0162: Department of Aging - Maryland Access Point - Dementia-Friendly Communities.

The MRHA supports HB 0162, which requires the Maryland Department of Aging to fund the Maryland Access Point Network in support of dementia-friendly communities. This funding would provide additional resources, training, and educational materials on community-based ways to support individuals living with dementia in Maryland.

In 2020, Maryland had the highest rate of Alzheimer's in the United States, with 12.9% of adults 65 and over having Alzheimer's dementia.¹ This burden is unevenly distributed in urban and rural areas of the state.

Alzheimer's disease and related dementias (ADRD) in Maryland remain significantly underserved in rural areas. In eastern and western Maryland, ADRD mortality rates remain high, despite low diagnosis rates.² This indicates that ADRD is frequently undiagnosed in rural Maryland. Specialists who treat Alzheimer's and dementia are also concentrated at urban hospitals in Maryland, meaning that rural hospitals face a shortage of ADRD physicians, despite having a higher need for specialized ADRD treatment.² HB 0162 will fund community-based methods to support individuals with dementia, an important step toward addressing this health disparity.

MRHA believes this legislation is important to support our rural communities and we urge you to support its passage.

With appreciation,
The Maryland Rural Health Association

1. 2025 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures. Alzheimer's Association. Web site. <https://www.alz.org/getmedia/e8f48f9-ad36-48ea-87f9-b74034635c1e/alzheimers-facts-and-figures.pdf>. Updated 2025. Accessed Feb 1, 2026.
2. Scott E. New study exposes hidden Alzheimer's "hot spots" in rural Maryland and what they reveal about America's growing healthcare divide. Society for Risk Analysis. Web site. <https://www.sra.org/2025/11/30/new-study-exposes-hidden-alzheimers-hot-spots-in-rural-maryland-and-what-they-reveal-about-americas-growing-health-care-divide/>. Updated 2025. Accessed Feb 1, 2026.

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