



# Testimony in Support of HB 811

## Multigenerational Third Places – Grants for Aging-in-Place Programs

### House Committee on Health

**Submitted by:** Margie Eulner Ott, Board President

**Organization:** Montgomery County Villages Consortium

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Good afternoon, Chair Bagnall and members of the Committee. My name is Margie Eulner Ott, and I am the Board President of the Montgomery County Villages Consortium, representing 30 neighbor-helping-neighbor Villages serving older adults across Montgomery County who wish to age in place with dignity, connection, and independence. I am pleased to offer testimony in strong support of HB 811, sponsored by Delegate Sarah Wolek.

### **About the Montgomery County Villages Consortium and the Village Movement**

The Village model is a community-driven approach to aging in place in which neighbors support neighbors through volunteer services, social programming, and peer connection. The Montgomery County Villages Consortium represents 30 Villages across our county, collectively serving approximately 8,400 older adults.

The depth of commitment within our Villages is remarkable. In FY25 alone, Village volunteers across Montgomery County logged 55,198 hours of service — time valued at over \$1.9 million. These are not paid professionals; they are neighbors showing up for neighbors, day after day.

### **Social Connection Is Not a Luxury — It Is a Health Necessity**

Research is unambiguous: social isolation is one of the most serious health risks facing older adults today. The U.S. Surgeon General has identified loneliness and isolation as a public health epidemic, with effects on mortality comparable to smoking 15 cigarettes a day. For older adults aging in place — particularly those who live alone or have limited mobility — the risk of isolation is acute.

Villages address this not only through practical services like rides and home repairs, but through something equally vital: community. Regular gatherings, shared meals, group outings, and multigenerational events give members a reason to leave their homes, a place to belong, and relationships that sustain them. This is the irreplaceable value of what researchers call a "third place" — a welcoming, neutral space outside of home and work where people gather, converse, and connect.

### **The Gap HB 811 Addresses**

Despite the proven value of third places, many Villages — particularly newer, smaller, or under-resourced ones — struggle to secure reliable gathering spaces. Without a consistent third place, it is enormously difficult to build and sustain the programming that keeps members engaged and connected. Some Villages rotate between borrowed spaces, limiting their ability to offer regular events. Others have curtailed programming simply because they cannot find an affordable, accessible, and welcoming venue. This is a gap that good intentions alone cannot close. This has been a consistent concern of Village leaders over this past year. Even rental of public school or recreation center spaces costs money and requires liability insurance certificates that these Village volunteers find difficult to obtain with limited funds.

HB 811 addresses this gap directly by authorizing the Department of Aging to make grants to nonprofit organizations and area agencies on aging to support social connection for older adults in aging-in-place programs through events and gatherings at multigenerational third places. This funding would give Villages and similar organizations the resources to establish, access, and sustain the gathering spaces their members depend on.

### **Conclusion**

The Village model works. Our members stay healthier, remain in their homes longer, and report far greater quality of life because of the connections their Villages provide. But those connections require places to happen. HB 811 is a targeted, practical investment in the infrastructure of community — and for thousands of older Marylanders aging in place, it could make all the difference.

I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 811, and I thank Delegate Wolek for her leadership on this issue.

Respectfully submitted,

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