

MARYLAND PSYCHIATRIC SOCIETY



January 30, 2026

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The Honorable Heather Bagnall
Health Committee
241 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Support: House Bill 202: Public Health - Social Isolation and Loneliness Pilot Grant Program - Establishment

Dear Chairwoman Bagnall & Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) and the Washington Psychiatric Society (WPS) are state medical organizations whose physician members specialize in diagnosing, treating, and preventing mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. Formed more than sixty-five years ago to support the needs of psychiatrists and their patients, both organizations work to ensure available, accessible, and comprehensive quality mental health resources for all Maryland citizens and strive through public education to dispel the stigma and discrimination of those suffering from a mental illness. As the district branches of the American Psychiatric Association covering the state of Maryland, MPS/WPS represent over 1200 psychiatrists and physicians currently in psychiatric training.

MPS/WPS strongly support House Bill 202 Public Health - Social Isolation and Loneliness Pilot Grant Program. as it is widely known by mental health providers that loneliness and isolation are preventable risk factors which, left unaddressed, can contribute substantially to decline in both physical and mental health. Conversely, our relationships and interactions with family, friends, colleagues, and neighbors, making up the foundation of our social connections, can be an essential part of building and maintaining health and wellness into older age. Therefore, growing opportunities for social connection in our neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, community centers, libraries, parks, sports facilities, and other recreational venues can directly support improved health, wellness, and quality of life on a population level.

10 Points highlighted from 'Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: *The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community*' (*Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation, 2023*):

- Adults across the globe rate their social relationships, particularly with family and close friends, as the most important source of meaning, purpose, and motivation in their lives
- Approximately half of U.S. adults report experiencing loneliness, with some of the highest rates among young adults
- In 2018, only 16% of Americans reported that they felt very attached to their local community
- Loneliness and social isolation increase the risk for premature death by 26% and 29% respectively
- Lacking social connection can increase the risk for premature death as much as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day
- Poor or insufficient social connection is associated with increased risk of disease, including a 29% increased risk of heart disease and a 32% increased risk of stroke
- Chronic loneliness and social isolation can increase the risk of developing dementia by approximately 50% in older adults
- Loneliness and social isolation among children and adolescents increase the risk of depression and anxiety
- Social isolation among older adults alone accounts for an estimated \$6.7 billion in excess Medicare spending annually
- In the U.S., stress-related absenteeism attributed to loneliness costs employers an estimated \$154 billion annually

Given the above data, and clinical experience indicating the negative impact of loneliness and isolation on the physical and mental health of our patients, we would like to play a role establishing the State Task Force on Loneliness and Isolation to study and make recommendations related to loneliness and isolation experienced by individuals in Maryland.

For these reasons, we support HB 202. If you have any questions regarding this testimony, please contact MPS lobbyist, Lisa Harris Jones at lisa.jones@mdlobbyist.com.

Respectfully Submitted,
The Maryland Psychiatric Society & Washington Psychiatric Society
Legislative Action Committee