



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB 202: Task Force on Loneliness and Isolation

Health Committee

Tuesday, February 10th - 2:00 PM

Chair Bagnall, Vice Chair Cullison, Members of the Health Committee,

In 2023, then U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy issued a health advisory declaring loneliness and isolation to be an epidemic requiring immediate action. Drawing on scientific literature, the Surgeon General defined social isolation as the objective state of having “few social relationships, social roles, group memberships, and infrequent social interaction,” which can lead to loneliness, the experience of distress caused by one’s unmet needs for socialization.¹ Weak, infrequent, and unsatisfactory social connections lead to poor health outcomes and generate significant costs to society at large.

HB 202 takes an important first step toward addressing this public health crisis in Maryland by piloting grant funding for targeted, community-based solutions. The bill establishes a one-year program of five \$20,000 grants administered by the Department of Health in consultation with the Department of Aging, the Governor’s Office for Children, and the Department of Housing and Community Development. This funding will support caretakers, educators, and community members who are actively working to strengthen social connection, subsidizing the cost to run or expand programming.

The program prioritizes populations at heightened risk of isolation, including seniors, young people, rural residents, and Marylanders with disabilities. Grant funds may be used to cover essential operating costs, allowing community organizations to focus on what works: building and sustaining meaningful human connection. A review of the pilot’s outcomes will inform future policy decisions and investments, ensuring Maryland’s response is both effective and evidence-based.

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¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. [*Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community.*](#)

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Loneliness and social isolation are linked to increased risk of cardiovascular disease, dementia, stroke, depression, anxiety, and premature death. Research suggests that the mortality impact of social disconnection rivals that of smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day—exceeding the risks associated with obesity and physical inactivity. The burden is especially heavy for caregivers, new parents, people experiencing unemployment, and those living alone.²

HB 202 is an important first step in understanding how the State of Maryland can best support healthy social connection and community. By addressing the root causes of loneliness, Maryland can improve health outcomes, strengthen communities, and reduce long-term costs to the healthcare system.

I urge the committee to give a favorable report on HB 202.

² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. [*Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community.*](#)