



## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Meena Seshamani, M.D., Ph.D., Secretary

February 10, 2026

The Honorable Heather Bagnall  
241 Taylor House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**RE: House Bill 202—Social Isolation and Loneliness Pilot Grant Program Establishment  
—Letter of Concern**

Dear Chair Bagnall and Committee,

The Maryland Department of Health (the Department) is submitting this letter of concern on House Bill (HB) 202—Social Isolation and Loneliness Pilot Grant Program Establishment. The bill would require the Department to establish and administer a pilot program to examine the impact of social isolation and loneliness on “vulnerable communities,” support programming to reduce isolation, particularly for “target populations,” and award a grant to five eligible entities with prioritization of awards for youth, seniors, and rural populations. While the Department acknowledges loneliness and social isolation as public health concerns, consistent with the U.S. Surgeon General’s 2023 Advisory,<sup>1</sup> the bill, as written, presents operational challenges described below.

At this time, the Department notes that certain terms within the bill – such as “vulnerable communities,” “target populations,” “youth,” “seniors,” and “rural populations” – are not defined. Additionally, while the bill indicates the creation of a pilot program, the language also references the use of grant funds for the “maintenance or expansion of a program that targets vulnerable populations.”

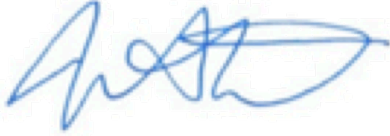
Grant funds are intended to be used for “research or development programs or capital expenditures.” It is currently unclear how capital expenditures would relate to the Department’s evaluation of the program, which must include reporting on progress in jurisdictions that received grants and the impact of program activities on patients, clients, and program participants. Grant funds are limited to a single year (FY2028) with reporting due the following year (FY2029). Given that the grants are limited to a maximum of \$20,000 per grantee for one fiscal year, the Department anticipates that the program’s jurisdiction-wide outcomes may be modest and the reporting on these outcomes could be limited by the size of the pilot project, presenting operational challenges for the Department which would be required to report on the program’s effects in FY2029.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2023. *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation. The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community.*  
<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>

The Department appreciates the Committee's consideration of these points and would be pleased to discuss this matter further. For additional information, please contact Meghan Lynch, Director of Governmental Affairs at [megan.lynch@maryland.gov](mailto:megan.lynch@maryland.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Meena Seshamani', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Meena Seshamani, MD, PhD  
Secretary