

HB0202\_RichardKaplowitz\_FAV

02/10/2026

Richard Keith Kaplowitz

Frederick, MD 21703

**TESTIMONY ON HB#0202 POSITION: FAVORABLE**

**Public Health - Social Isolation and Loneliness Pilot Grant Program – Establishment**

**TO:** Chair Bagnall, Vice Chair Cullison, and members of the Health Committee

**FROM:** Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard Keith Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3, Frederick County. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB#/0202, **Public Health - Social Isolation and Loneliness Pilot Grant Program – Establishment**

The United States Department of Health and Human Services has noted *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation*<sup>1</sup>

In the scientific literature, I found confirmation of what I was hearing. In recent years, about one-in-two adults in America reported experiencing loneliness.<sup>1-3</sup> And that was before the COVID-19 pandemic cut off so many of us from friends, loved ones, and support systems, exacerbating loneliness and isolation. Loneliness is far more than just a bad feeling—it harms both individual and societal health. It is associated with a greater risk of cardiovascular disease, dementia, stroke, depression, anxiety, and premature death. The mortality impact of being socially disconnected is similar to that caused by smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day,<sup>4</sup> and even greater than that associated with obesity and physical inactivity. And the harmful consequences of a society that lacks social connection can be felt in our schools, workplaces, and civic organizations, where performance, productivity, and engagement are diminished. Given the profound consequences of loneliness and isolation, we have an opportunity, and an obligation, to make the same investments in addressing social connection that we have made in addressing tobacco use, obesity, and the addiction crisis.

Maryland should support this work to study and overcome these problems. The bill being proposed will accomplish that by establishing the Social Isolation and Loneliness Pilot Grant Program in the Maryland Department of Health to provide grants for the operating costs associated with the maintenance or expansion of programs that target vulnerable populations with socioemotional support addressing social isolation and loneliness; requiring the Governor to include in the budget bill for fiscal year 2028 an appropriation of \$100,000 for the Program; etc.

This is an investment in the mental and physical health of Marylanders.

**I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB#/0202.**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>