



Meritus Health

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House Health Committee
240 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

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

Chair Bagnall, Vice Chair Cullison, and members of the Health Committee,

I write today on behalf of Meritus Health in support of House Bill 202: Public Health – Social Isolation and Loneliness Pilot Grant Program – Establishment.

Loneliness and social isolation are measurable health risks that drive worse health outcomes and higher healthcare utilization. In 2021, Meritus Health launched the Meritus Care Caller Program as a structured intervention to address social isolation among community members, particularly older adults and those with chronic conditions. The program uses outreach calls every one to two weeks to provide consistent human connection and identify emerging needs early. Today, the program is staffed by three paid team members and supported by more than 50 trained volunteers who collectively reach over 300 individuals on a recurring basis.

Meritus formally evaluated this work and published the results in a peer-reviewed article published in the Journal for Healthcare Quality (Feldmiller E, Messner L, Gona SR, Joshi M. Eradicating the Loneliness Epidemic: One Phone Call at a Time. J Healthc Qual. 2024 Sep-Oct 01;46(5):300-305). Program data showed that after four months of participation, 95% of participants reported feeling less lonely. Over 750 people have been through the program, and approximately 6,000 calls were made just last year, illustrating both the scale and operational feasibility of this approach.

It has been a privilege for me to be a Care Caller since the start, and I can tell you how rewarding it is. The Meritus Care Caller Program is relatively simple, meaningful, and doable. It provides real-world evidence that targeted investments can produce measurable results in an important societal issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maulik S. Joshi".

Maulik S. Joshi, Dr.P.H.
President and CEO, Meritus Health
President and Professor, Meritus School of Osteopathic Medicine