



Testimony in SUPPORT of *House Bill 202 – Public Health – Social Isolation and Loneliness Pilot Grant Program – Establishment*
Health Committee
February 10, 2026

The Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington (JCRC) serves as the public affairs and community relations arm of the Jewish community. We represent over 100 Jewish social service agencies, synagogues, and schools throughout Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The JCRC is strongly committed to cultivating a society based on mutual respect, justice, equity and safety. We work throughout the region to advocate for our nonprofits that serve the most vulnerable on a non-sectarian basis and to campaign for important policy interests on behalf of the Jewish community and all Marylanders.

The JCRC supports House Bill 202, Public Health – Social Isolation and Loneliness Pilot Grant Program – Establishment. This Bill will establish a Social Isolation and Loneliness Pilot Grant Program in the Maryland Department of Health to provide grants for operating costs due to the maintenance or expansion of programs that target vulnerable populations with socioemotional support addressing social isolation and loneliness.

The Jewish Social Service Agency (JSSA) is one of the crown jewel nonprofits that the JCRC has represented for decades. It is a leading health and social wellness agency that supports Jews and non-Jews alike who need behavioral health care, chronic illness treatment, disability services, and hospice care. For older adults, JSSA is also renowned for its Holocaust Survivor Program and Coming of Age Program. HB 202 is a critical resource for both of these programs as costs to provide essential services continue to increase and Medicaid reimbursements are expected to dramatically decrease. This Pilot Grant Program, as outlined in HB 202, is a true lifeline for JSSA and the vulnerable, fragile population it has successfully served for years.

Holocaust survivors in Maryland continue to face escalating and complex needs as they age into their 80s and 90s. JSSA, the primary provider of culturally competent, trauma-informed care for this population, currently supports 268 frail, low-income survivors, in Maryland, who rely on the agency for safety, stability, and dignity. Approximately 80.2% of Maryland survivors live at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty

Level. Their health and daily living needs are increasing rapidly, with rising levels of cognitive decline, physical frailty, and dependence on personal care such as bathing, feeding, mobility support, and medication management. Despite state funding in FY26 and support from the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, gaps remain. For FY26, JSSA anticipates a \$470,000 shortfall in essential home care services, funding that is necessary to keep survivors safe at home and prevent harmful institutional placement. JSSA's specialized model has proven effective: last year, 97.8% of Maryland survivors remained in their homes, with only 2.2% requiring facility-based care, an exceptional outcome for such a medically fragile group. Survivors receive transportation, meals, personal care, homemaker support, care management, and home modifications through a trauma-informed system that cannot be easily replicated. Consistent funding is essential to preserve continuity of care, as even brief service gaps can lead to medical crises, trauma reactivation, or premature institutionalization.

JSSA's Coming of Age (CoA) program in Montgomery County provides cultural, educational, recreational, and wellness programming to more than 500 older adults each year. Through lectures, excursions, movement classes, discussion groups, and social gatherings, CoA helps seniors build connections and reduce isolation. A JSSA social worker offers on-site consultations and referrals, supporting participants in addressing emerging challenges early and avoiding higher-cost interventions later. To ensure accessibility, the program also provides subsidized transportation and clear, consistent communication, enabling older adults of all backgrounds and mobility levels to stay engaged and connected. For many older adults, Coming of Age has become a trusted source of stability, community, and emotional wellbeing. **Participants consistently report increased social connectedness, new friendships, and reduced loneliness.** But as funding becomes less certain, this critical program—and the preventive benefits it delivers—is at risk. **Without stable support, older adults may lose access to services that keep them active, engaged, and safely aging in place.**

House Bill 202 would also benefit another JCRC social services agency, the Charles E. Smith Life Communities, which runs the critically acclaimed ElderSAFE Center™ program to protect survivors of elder abuse. ElderSAFE provides temporary shelter, trauma-informed care, and community referrals to vulnerable adults, age 60 years and older, who are survivors of abuse (physical, sexual, psychological, and financial) and/or neglect. It serves older adults from all faiths and backgrounds and admits eligible clients to shelter without regard to income or ability to pay. Temporary shelter is offered at Charles E. Smith Life Communities' residences, where they receive trauma-informed medical care and supportive therapies. ElderSAFE staff lead a Community Coalition of social service and government agencies, hospitals, and local law enforcement offices to advance a coordinated response to elder abuse and to facilitate referrals for permanent housing and legal and social services for survivors of abuse. They provide advanced training in elder abuse prevention, recognition and response to mandated reporters, community members and a wide variety of professionals serving older adults in the Greater Washington area.

The Pilot Grant Program would allow ElderSAFE to continue its programming for this incredibly fragile and vulnerable population. The cost of rent, clothes, personal care items, transportation, private aides to accompany clients to court, medical and legal appointments have all increased in the past year. This legislation and funding will help offset the costs to ensure that older adults in Maryland can live safe and healthy lives free from abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation.

The JCRC has a sacred obligation to protect the wellbeing of Holocaust survivors and the older adults who depend on vital programs like the Holocaust Survivor Program, Coming of Age, and ElderSAFE. This Pilot Grant Program will help honor the lived experiences of survivors who endured profound trauma and ensure they are not confronted with instability in their final years. It also preserves a proven community resource that strengthens the health, connection, and dignity of older adults. For these reasons, we support House Bill 202 and ask for a favorable report.