

Testimony before House Appropriations Committee
****Support****

House Bill 498 – Department of Aging - Grants for Aging-in-Place Programs - Funding
February 11, 2020

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Maryland Chapter (NASW-MD), we would like to express our support for House Bill 498, Department of Aging – Grants for Aging-in-Place Programs – Funding.

We would like to specifically address one subset of programs impacted by this bill: **Villages**.

Villages are grassroots, consumer driven membership models that promote and support aging in community. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, aging in community is the “ability to remain in one’s own home or community in a safe, comfortable, interdependent, and engaged manner irrespective of age, income, or ability.” We support this bill because aging in place is the preferred choice of the majority of older Marylanders and such support could reduce use of much more expensive models including Waiver programs and skilled nursing facility care. In particular, we support the provision of funding to Village models that enhance access to necessary supports for older adults to remain in their communities of choice.

Villages are initiated and designed by older adults to meet their expressed needs in their particular community. Moreover, most Villages are considered volunteer-first models, providing most of their services through the help of volunteers from the community. They share a vision of social engagement, recognizing the valuable role of older adults in their communities and the importance of helping these individuals to remain in the community. Villages provide concrete services and resources to their members, such as handyman services and social events, while also creating a sense of connection that helps to stave off social isolation. Villages optimize opportunities for engagement, connection and well-being in order to enhance quality of life and prolong the time that their members can remain safely within the community. By tapping the natural human and social capital within a community, Villages enhance access to the resources necessary to promote aging in community. Villages, thus, can reduce societal costs to support aging in place by enhancing access to preventive supports and tapping existing resources to meet needs.

However, the Village model is not without its challenges. One of the challenges is that these are typically designed as membership organizations with annual dues and this may make it difficult

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for low-income older adults to afford to join a Village. Thus, state level grants could be used by Villages to offer subsidies for membership dues, perhaps on a sliding scale, to expand access to low-income community residents. Moreover, state grants could be used to provide pilot funds to assist in development of villages within under-resourced communities. Given the increasing numbers of older adults in Maryland and the preferences for most older adults to remain in their communities of choice, the Village model has tremendous potential to support healthy aging in community. Expanding access to Village models throughout the state responds directly to the expressed preferences of older adults to age in place while potentially generating substantial cost savings for Maryland in delayed use of more costly state-funded services. Thus a small investment in expanding access to the Village model is a winning formula for all Marylanders.

We urge you to vote YES on HB 498.

Thank you,

NASW-MD Committee on Aging