

Testimony of the Alzheimer's Association Greater Maryland and National Capital Area Chapters
HB 554 - Division of Consumer Protection – Assisted Living Programs
Position: Favorable

Chair Pendergrass and Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk,

The Alzheimer's Association writes to issue its support for HB 554, legislation which requires assisted living programs which act as representative payees for residents of the facility to report the use of Social Security benefits on behalf of residents, along with other local/state/federal funds used by residents of the facility during the past year on behalf of residents who are aged, disabled, or blind. It also requires the Office of Health Care Quality (OHCQ) within the Maryland Department of Health to refer an allegation of an unfair, abusive, or deceptive trade practice by an assisted living program to the Division of Consumer Protection of the Office of the Attorney General.

For most people over 65 years old, Medicare is the most common form of income. In addition to Medicare, the person with dementia may qualify for a number of public programs. These programs provide income support or long-term care services to people who are eligible. This includes Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) for workers younger than 65, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Medicaid, veteran benefits, and tax deductions and credits.

Individuals with dementia, who comprise over 40 percent of the population in assisted living facilities, almost always have at least one other chronic condition. Caring for someone with multiple chronic conditions—especially when that includes dementia—significantly complicates the care needed. Over time, people with Alzheimer's will lose the ability to use words and may communicate their needs through behavior, which presents added challenges for care workers. They may, often, appoint a provider as a representative payee because they do not have the support or wherewithal to manage their own finances.

Maryland has, according to OHCQ's most recent annual report, nearly 1600 assisted living facilities. They are mainly smaller providers of care; 92 percent of them have fewer than 50 beds. And most of them provide excellent care to Marylanders in need. Yet in any industry, there are bad actors. And, as our organization advocates for Marylanders who cannot advocate for themselves, we agree with the transparency this bill promotes and the framework it puts in place to protect consumers from deceptive practices.

We urge a favorable report on this legislation

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