



COMMISSION ON AGING

February 25, 2021

Hon. Shane Pendergrass, Chair
House Health and Government Operations Committee
Room 241 House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: HB 0910

Dear Chairman Pendergrass:

I am writing on behalf of the Montgomery County Commission on Aging to express our strong support for HB 910. HB 910 would require insurers, nonprofit health service plans and health maintenance organizations to provide a \$750 benefit per hearing aid for each hearing-impaired person's ear every 36 months. The current law applies only to children and is silent on any minimum benefit amount provided by insurance companies.

The Commission on Aging was established in 1974 to advise County government on the needs, interests, and issues of older adult residents, and to advocate on their behalf. Our work is ever more significant as our older adult population continues to grow and to become more diverse. A primary area of our concern is the protection and support for vulnerable and isolated older adults.

Forty-eight million Americans suffer from some degree of hearing loss - over 15% of the population. That number rises to 33% in older adults between ages 65 and 74. In Montgomery County, that could mean over 50,000 older adults suffer with some hearing impairment. Hearing loss can be associated with many health problems, including dementia and social isolation, currently on the rise due to the COVID pandemic. People wait an average of seven years before seeking help. According to one source, more than 38 percent of older adults with hearing loss who don't use hearing aids labeled cost as the biggest reason for avoiding the devices, <https://www.seniorliving.org/hearing/hearing-aid-study/>. Only 1 in 5 people who could benefit from a hearing aid device actually use one. HB 0910 would enable Marylanders to purchase needed hearing aid support that is otherwise unaffordable. We urge a favorable report on HB 910.

Sincerely,

Barbara Selter sb

Barbara Selter, Chair

Department of Health and Human Services

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