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Finance Committee

Joint Committees

Children, Youth, and Families

Ending Homelessness

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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony of Senator Joanne C. Benson
SB 844: Adult Protective Services- Vulnerable Adults Registry- Investigations and Records of Abuse and Neglect and Workgroup Study

Good afternoon Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher and members of the Committee. One of our main duties as public servants is to protect the little people- the most vulnerable in our State. Whether it's our seniors, individuals with mental or physical disabilities, or anyone who often feels helpless and homeless- it's our duty to protect them. Yet according to the National Council on Aging, approximately 1 in 10 Americans aged 60 and up have experienced some form of elder abuse.¹ While in 2012, 1.3 million violent crimes-including rape and physical assault- occurred against people with disabilities, a number that has steadily increased since 2008.² Currently, sections 3-604 and 3-605 of the Criminal Law Article in Maryland prohibits the abuse and neglect of a vulnerable adult. Yet, Maryland doesn't possess a central statewide database of vulnerable adult abuse. So often times, our most vulnerable in society are falling victim to repeat offenders.

Senate Bill 844 seeks to address this issue. Senate 844 creates a statewide confidential and centralized vulnerable adult registry. This bill will also establish a workgroup which will create a space in which experts across the State can study the best practices on how to implement the registry in the State of Maryland.

We must do our due diligence in identifying these bad actors who have abused, neglected or exploited our loved ones and our most vulnerable in our state of Maryland. Currently 26 states have adult abuse registries for perpetrators of elder and vulnerable adult abuse.³ The purpose of this registry is to make information available to individuals, agencies or employers authorized to receive such information. Availing this information will reduce the risk of abuse for vulnerable adults and will improve hiring practices and assist in preventing future abuse for our most vulnerable.

Thus, I urge the committee for a favorable report of Senate Bill 844.

¹ "Adult Protective Services Abuse Registry National Report," USC Center on Elder Mistreatment, University of Southern California, last modified April 01, 2019, <https://eldermistreatment.usc.edu/adult-protective-servicesabuse-registry-national-report/>.

² "Violence Against People with Disabilities Occurs at Alarming Rates," End Abuse of People with Disabilities, Vera Institute of Justice, last modified 2020, <https://www.endabusepwd.org/problem/alarming-rates/>.

³ University of Southern California, "Adult Protective Services Abuse Registry National Report."