

Testimony Before the Senate Finance Committee

Senate Bill 511 Human Services – Secretary of Aging – Qualifications

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Maryland Chapter (NASW-MD) Committee on Aging, we would like to express our support for Senate Bill 511 – Human Services – Secretary of Aging – Qualifications.

We are in favor of this bill because we understand that the Secretary of the Department of Aging plays a vital role in planning, delivering, and evaluating essential services to older and Marylanders and those with disabilities. This individual must possess the knowledge and commitment to fulfill these vital functions which impact the health and well being of over 1.5 million Marylanders.

The Maryland Department of Aging is not only a state-level cabinet Department, but also a State Unit on Aging (SUA), as defined by the Federal Older Americans Act (the OAA). The OAA establishes 56 State Units on Aging (SUAs) across the U.S., which are responsible for developing and administering multi-year state plans that advocate for and support older residents. The OAA mandates a wide range of programs for older adults, including home-delivered meals, legal assistance, and advocacy for long-term care residents. The Secretary of the Department of Aging is responsible for “administering those programs and services under the federal Older Americans Act of 1965 that are delegated to the State...” (Administration for Community Living).

Due to the complexities of the job, including the dual federal/state responsibilities and the myriad of aging services for which they are responsible, it is essential that the Secretary possess a thorough knowledge of the OAA and other key laws and regulations governing senior services. Just as importantly, they must possess knowledge of the service needs of older adults and demonstrate a commitment to this population.

As social workers serving older adults, we are committed to the OAA’s emphasis on targeting limited resources to older adults with the greatest economic or social need. This need is defined as “the need resulting from an income level at or below the poverty line..and... the need caused by non-economic factors, which include: a) physical and mental disabilities; b) language barriers; and c) cultural, social, or geographical isolation, including isolation caused by racial or ethnic status, that” i) restricts the ability of an individual to perform normal daily tasks or iii) threatens the capacity of the individual to live independently (Older Americans Act).

Since resources are limited, the Secretary must understand the priorities established in the OAA, particularly the requirement to target programs to those with the greatest economic and social need.

SB 511 would require that every Secretary of the Department of Aging possess the knowledge of laws and programs affecting older adults, and just as importantly, a commitment to the stated missions of the OAA and the Department.

For these reasons, we ask that you give a favorable report to SB 511.

Respectfully,

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