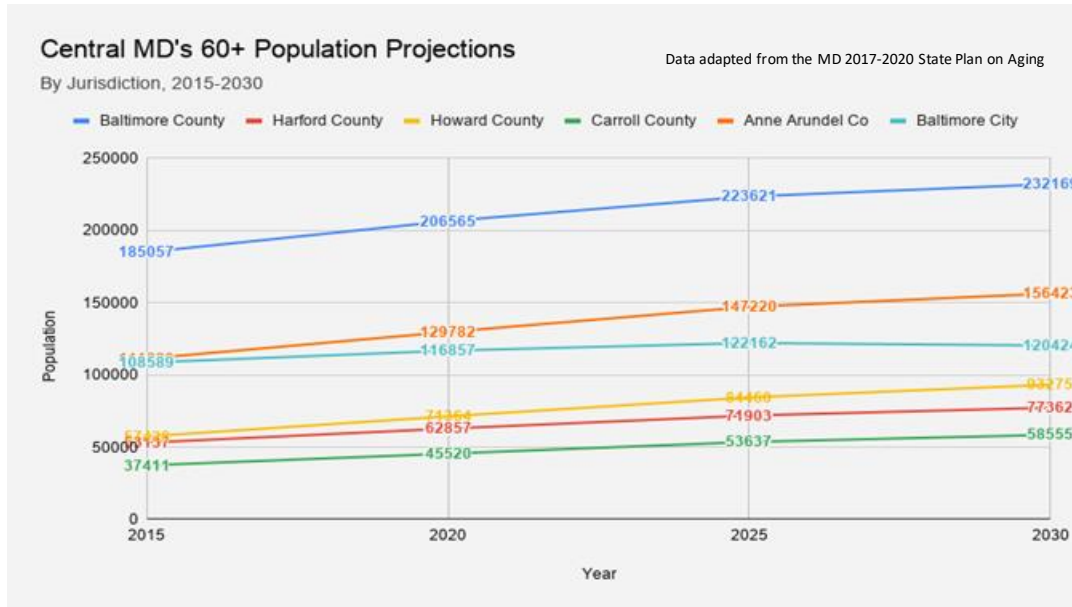


Senate Finance Committee, February 24, 2022 SB 511 – Human
Services – Secretary of Aging - Qualifications **SUPPORT**

Thank you, members of the Senate Finance Committee, for this opportunity to offer my support today for SB 511. My name is Kim Burton and I speak as a professional who has worked in aging and behavioral health services for more than 25 years. I am also a citizen of Baltimore County where, as you can see on the graph below, we have the highest number of adults over the age of 60 in Central Maryland.



I include this graph as a visual in the goal of my testimony which is to assert that the growth in need for aging programs and services necessitates the establishment of relevant qualifications for the leader of the Maryland Department of Aging, as none currently exist. Marylanders from age 60 to age 100+ (individuals over the age of 80 represent Maryland’s fastest growing population) are extremely diverse requiring an understanding of the evidence based and data driven programs which target an ever-expanding continuum of need.

My area of expertise is in geriatric behavioral health. The Maryland Department of Aging, in partnership with the Maryland Department of Health released a report to the legislature in October of 2021 specifying: *“The prevalence of cognitive and behavioral health disorders among older adults is high resulting in concerning trends around older adult suicide, overdose, hospital lengths of stay, caregiver burnout, and overall costs to the healthcare system. Workforce shortages as well funding and service capacity limitations present challenges to meeting a growing demand on Maryland’s healthcare, behavioral health and long term care systems. The Maryland Department of Aging and the Department of Health’s Behavioral Health Administration, with input from a group of expert stakeholders, have identified opportunities for cross agency collaboration and the steps to create a multi-year plan to address the growing need of Marylanders with cognitive and behavioral health needs.”*

Such concerns have only grown with the circumstances of COVID 19. No doubt, the multi-year plan and cross agency collaboration will require an even deeper level of departmental expertise to foster strategic planning and program development which address behavioral and cognitive wellness, caregiver support and workforce challenges.

The experts working in Maryland's Department of Aging and our Area Agencies on Aging must have a Secretary who can hit the ground running with the background and knowledge necessary to immediately execute the multiple demands of the office. I've witnessed the steep learning curve that our past Department of Aging Secretaries have experienced to get up to speed with the duties and expectations of the Department's specialized work because they did not have expertise in the field of aging or working knowledge of the Older American's Act. The baseline requirements offered in SB 511 will ensure a cabinet member who is immediately prepared to review and formulate policy recommendations to the Governor for programs unique to older adults. These baseline requirements will ensure that the Secretary has knowledge of and commitment to the requirements and vision of the Older Americans Act and the Maryland Department of Aging. Our current Secretary has established a plan for the Maryland Department of Aging that is focused, ambitious and urgent. The passage of SB 511 will help to maximize enactment of this plan.

Thank you again for this opportunity and I urge your favorable report on SB 511.