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Judicial Proceedings Committee

Joint Committee on Children, Youth,  
and Families

Joint Committee on the Chesapeake  
and Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area



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## *The Senate of Maryland* ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

### TESTIMONY OF SENATOR SHELLY HETTLEMAN SB 511-Human Services-Secretary of Aging Qualifications

According to the United States Census Bureau, 15.9% of Maryland residents are 65 or older.<sup>1</sup> Aging individuals are at risk for financial exploitation, elderly abuse, and a myriad of other problems that have the potential to adversely impact their quality of life.<sup>2</sup> The Maryland Department of Aging is committed to improving the quality of life of the aging community through its mission of creating Maryland as an attractive location for older adults through vibrant communities and supportive services.<sup>3</sup> Since the Cabinet level Department was first established (in 1998), the field of aging has matured. This bill seeks to ensure that the leader of this agency has the knowledge, experience and expertise in this ever-changing field that is experiencing a tremendous growth in population.

SB 511 looks forward and creates certain requirements that the next Secretary of Aging must fulfill. It is patterned after a law enacted in 2004 when Governor Ehrlich created the Department of Disabilities. Just like the Secretary of the Department of Disabilities, the next Secretary of Aging would be required to hold at least a bachelor's degree, be knowledgeable about laws, regulations, and legislation regarding aging as well as programs directed to aging populations, and demonstrate a commitment to the missions of the Federal Older Americans Act and the Department of Aging, two entities that protect the livelihood of aging citizens. Moreover, federal funding from the Older Americans Act is responsible for over 50% of the Department's budget.

There continues to be innovation in the field of aging, resulting in the development of evidence-based programming, best practices, performance outcomes, and specific expertise to inform interventions to support the growing aging population. The National Conference of State Legislatures points to the necessity for policymakers to integrate comprehensive approaches that are often multidisciplinary and span numerous policy areas into policy supporting aging populations due to the unique challenges that they face.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> N.d. Census.Gov. Accessed February 17, 2022. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/MD>.

<sup>2</sup> Lachs, Mark S., and S. Duke Han. 2015. "Age-Associated Financial Vulnerability: An Emerging Public Health Issue." *Annals of Internal Medicine* 163 (11): 877-78. <https://doi.org/10.7326/M15-0882>.

<sup>3</sup> "About Us." n.d. Maryland Department of Aging. Accessed February 17, 2022. <https://aging.maryland.gov/Pages/AboutUsMDOA.aspx>.

<sup>4</sup> Scotti, Samantha, Alise Garcia, and Lesley Kennedy. n.d. "Comprehensive Policy Approaches to Support the Aging Population." Ncsl.Org. Accessed February 17, 2022. <https://www.ncsl.org/research/health/comprehensive-policy-approaches-to-support-the-aging-population.aspx>.

Integrating multidisciplinary fields of policy and keeping up with the rapidly expanding innovation in the field of aging requires expertise on evidence-based programs, legislation, and extensive commitment to protecting the lives and livelihood of the growing aging population in Maryland.

It is essential that we uphold the missions of the Department of Aging and the Federal Older Americans Act to ensure that our constituents thrive. I ask for your support of SB511. Thank you.