



*Catherine R. Willis, LMSW
President
Representing Queen Anne's County
Department of Community Services*

*Gina Valentine, Vice President
Representing Carroll County
Bureau of Aging & Disabilities*

*Gary Gunther, Treasurer
Representing Upper Shore Aging, Inc.,
Talbot, Caroline & Kent Counties*

*Karrisa Gouin, Secretary
Representing Anne Arundel County
Department of Aging and Disabilities*

**Senate Finance Committee
February 24, 2022**

Legislation: SB 511 Human Services – Secretary of Aging - Qualifications

Sponsor: Senator Hettleman

Position: Support

The nineteen member organizations of M4A serve Maryland's older and disabled citizens, providing a range of cost-effective state, federal and locally funded programs that help individuals remain secure in the community with dignity, independence, and choice as they age. M4A and its associated Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) represent the "front line" in Maryland's challenge to meet the complex and varied needs of well over 1 million older adults statewide.

The Maryland Association of Area Agencies on Aging supports Senate Bill 511 to establish certain qualification requirements for an individual appointed as the Secretary of Aging. Due to the growth, maturity, and evolution in the field of Aging we strongly support this effort.

Currently the population of seniors in Maryland is growing rapidly; a trend that will continue as the baby boomer generation ages. The field of aging has matured significantly since the Department of Aging was established. The confluence of the surging senior population, maturation of the field, and limited state and federal resources to serve the growing population necessitates a qualified leader who can at the outset:

- Enhance the development of evidenced-based programming
- Use their knowledge of and experience with best practices to facilitate innovative and creative services that meet the needs of older adults, caregivers, families, and veterans
- Use performance outcomes and data to make informed decisions
- Provide seamless and specific expertise so services and programming for Maryland's older adult population is provided in a meaningful way across the state.

While this bill is forward looking and will not become effective until the next Administration, it is largely modeled on the qualifications for the Secretary of Disabilities, which created under then-Governor Ehrlich's Administration and passed into law by the Maryland General Assembly. The two fields, aging and disability are similarly mature at this point and largely similarly situated.

SB511 will require that the Secretary of Aging:

- Have extensive experience with and knowledge of laws, legislation, and regulations, relating to Aging; and programs for Aging individuals, including evidence-based and data-driven programs.
- Demonstrate a commitment to the missions of both the Federal Older American's Act and the Department.

Maryland is fortunate to have a wealth of expertise in the field of aging around the state. We have an opportunity to pull from that existing expert talent and bring into public service a person familiar with the important aging practices and trends to help lead Maryland as our aging population grows. We urge a favorable report on SB 511.