

Testimony of the Alzheimer's Association Greater Maryland and National Capital Area Chapters
HB 0731 - Department of Aging - Dementia Care Coordinator and Dementia Care Navigation Programs
Position: Favorable

Chair Pendergrass and Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk,

My name is Eric Colchamiro, and I am Director of Government Affairs for the Alzheimer's Association in Maryland. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today on this legislation, which: establishes the position of Dementia Care Coordinator in the Department of Aging to oversee dementia care navigation programs; requires each area agency to maintain a dementia care navigation program; authorizes dementia care navigators to provide support services for caregivers; increases community awareness, offers of technical assistance, and establishes relationships with health care providers; and requires the Governor to include \$1,600,000 in the annual budget bill to employ the Dementia Care Coordinator and dementia care navigators

I want to start by thanking the bill sponsor, Delegate Lewis Young. She and I have shared many long meetings of the Maryland Commission on Caregiving. She is a committed, dedicated, and savvy policymaker. And the Alzheimer's Association is grateful for her decision to put forward this legislation.

Caregiving itself, and specifically dementia caregiving, is not something that often gets legislated. Paid family leave legislation has again been put forward this Session; yet as far as direct outreach to support caregivers, and help them understand how to provide care, the bills and the resources are few and far between. So what is the motivation for putting this legislation forward—and amidst many competing priorities—why is there a significant budgetary ask? It is because dementia caregivers need help.

The 2021 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures report indicates that an estimated 238,000 Marylanders – our family members and friends - provided more than 364 million hours of unpaid care to someone with dementia.

- Overall, Maryland has the third-highest percentage nationwide of adult dementia caregivers;
- Nearly 69 percent of those caregivers have chronic health conditions;
- Roughly 28 percent of them have depression; and
- More than one-third of these dementia caregivers provide over 20 hours per week in care; more than half have been providing care for at least two years.

So why has caregiving, and particularly dementia caregiving, taken such a toll on these Marylanders? It is because this is a complicated and cruel disease. People living with dementia may show signs of confusion. They may need extra and/or written reminders for their activities of daily living. As the disease progresses, individuals are unable to eat, dress, or bathe without assistance. Over time, people with Alzheimer's will lose the ability to use words and may communicate their needs through behavior, which presents added challenges for care workers. And six in 10 people with dementia will wander. A person with Alzheimer's may not remember his or her name or address — and can become disoriented, even in familiar places and with familiar people.

The bill before you today mandates the creation of a program mirroring Wisconsin's Dementia Care Specialist Program, which began in 2015 under Republican Governor Scott Walker, and is now up to over \$7 million in funding. I am grateful that Joy Schmidt, a dementia care specialist in Dane County Wisconsin, will be joining us today via Zoom to discuss how Wisconsin's initiative works. I am equally grateful that Larry Thomas, a dementia caregiver for his 100-year-old mother, is here to share his perspective about why caregivers need help. And I am particularly grateful that Mike Razzi, a St. Mary's County advocate living with early-onset dementia, is here today to briefly share his story and explain why help to detect dementia early is so important.

Thanks again for the opportunity to speak today. Thank you to the 19 co-sponsors of this bill, who recognize the importance of dementia caregiving. I urge the Committee to pass a favorable report on this legislation—and, like Wisconsin and New York and North Dakota and other states—devote state specific funding to aiding dementia caregivers, so Maryland can continue to build an infrastructure for more fully addressing this chronic disease.