



Testimony to the Maryland Senate Finance Committee in Support of the Miriam Kelty Aging and Senior Social Connection Hub and Spoke Pilot Program bill, SB875.
March 1, 2024

Members of the Committee:

My name is Mary Jo Deering. I am President of the Washington Area Villages Exchange (WAVE). WAVE is the nonprofit umbrella organization that brings together 79 nonprofit villages in Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, and Washington, DC, to learn and grow by sharing experiences and ideas. We serve the 43 known villages in Maryland. Miriam Kelty was one of the WAVE founders in 2010. She created and led an innovative village in Bannockburn, Montgomery County, for many years; personally mentored villages around the region; and served as WAVE president for several years. We're pleased that she is honored by this bill and know that she would be too.

My testimony may or may not necessarily reflect the opinions of individual villages that participate in WAVE.

WAVE strongly agrees that that villages are vital contributors to the well-being of older adults and can help them thrive in their communities. In the nearly 15 years that WAVE has been serving villages, we have seen a significant evolution of approaches to creating and sustaining them. The original model—geographically small, neighborhood based—still flourishes in many communities. In addition, the value of collaboration and economies of scale has promoted new models capable of assembling more resources for aging populations. We are also seeing more multigenerational villages. What remains the same is the “neighbors getting to know and help neighbors” principle.

The hub-and-spokes model is being explored around the country as a promising approach to help sustain existing neighborhood villages and make it possible for new villages to be created in underserved areas. By gathering certain common administrative functions in the hub, “spokes” villages can focus on hyper-local neighborhood connections.

The proposed pilot project can make an important contribution to learning, testing, and developing best practices for the hub and spokes model of village management. There is

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a dearth of evidence about this innovative model that can potentially offer helpful efficiencies for growing and sustaining villages. The documentation and reports from the pilot village will be invaluable.

WAVE is partnering with the Maryland Department of Aging on projects to encourage and support villages across the state. There are many counties that have no villages at present. We will be reaching out to counties and non-governmental entities to inform them of approaches they can take to promote, establish, and support villages in their areas. The hub-and-spokes model is an attractive option for them to help initiate sustainable villages in their areas. This pilot project in Montgomery County will provide important lessons to help inform their decisions. We would welcome members of this committee or your staff to attend the meetings and programs we will lead.

On a personal note, I myself created a village in my community in Montgomery County 10 years ago. It is a no-member, no-fee all-volunteer model. I started it because I intended to “age in place.” I’ve told my family I’ll only leave my house feet first. Our village is flourishing with healthy, active neighbors. But as we age, our village will need to consider the benefits of joining a hub-and-spokes model. I’d like to know there are good examples available when we need them.

Thank you for your attention. I hope you will support this bill.

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