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TO: Senate Finance Committee

FROM: Comprehensive Housing Assistance, Inc. (CHAI)

SUBJECT: SB 875 Miriam Kelty Aging and Senior Social Connection Hub and Spoke Pilot Program Elderly

DATE: March 1, 2024

POSITION: Favorable

Comprehensive Housing Assistance, Inc. (CHAI) supports SB 875 Miriam Kelty Aging and Senior Social Connection Hub and Spoke Pilot Program Elderly

Comprehensive Housing Assistance, Inc. (CHAI) is a community based nonprofit organization serving northwest Baltimore City and County. Now celebrating 40 years of community service, CHAI strengthens northwest neighborhoods through housing and community development so residents of all ages can thrive. With nearly 1,700 units of affordable senior housing, CHAI’s work has a special focus on supporting older adults to age well in the community for as long as they choose. Beyond our safe, stable, and supportive housing communities, CHAI provides many programs and services directed specifically to support seniors aging in their own homes. These include the Myerberg Center, a 55+ hub of activity, wellness, and connection; our Senior Home Repair and Benefits program, which offers home repairs and modifications to low-income senior homeowners; our new CHAIway senior transportation program; and Northwest Neighbors Connecting, a thriving village of approximately 120 members established in 2012.

In the 12 years since our NNC village began, we have seen first-hand the enormous value of the village model and the importance of our village to its members. NNC is member-run – all programming, trips, speakers, clubs, and events are created and designed by members for members. This keeps them engaged in the kind of activity they find meaningful and allows them to continually innovate and refresh the way they spend time together. NNC members participate in art club, diversity dialogues, cultural outings, affinity circles, and more. But more important than the activities themselves is the bond of care they offer one another. They provide weekly wellness checks, support one another through medical procedures, celebrate birthdays, mourn losses, and generally show up for one another when needed. NNC members truly have a village to support them as they age in place. This support was never more important than during the pandemic, and the value of NNC to its members grew tremendously during that time.

CHAI fully supports Senate Bill 875, which establishes the Miriam Kelty Aging and Senior Social Connection Hub and Spoke Pilot Program in the Maryland Department of Aging. We are excited to see the development of a plan for the pilot program and would like to offer our support to the Montgomery County Consortium as the work begins. Over the past 12 years, we have learned much about what makes villages successful and would be glad to contribute to this effort.

