



**Testimony of the Alzheimer's Association
Greater Maryland and National Capital Area Chapters**

On

HB1470 - First Responders - Mandatory Mental Health Training

POSITION: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENT

Dear Chairman Clippinger and Vice-Chair Atterbeary,

My name is Eric Colchamiro, and I am the Director of Government Affairs for the Alzheimer's Association in Maryland. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on House bill 1470; today, I offer the Alzheimer's Association's support for this legislation, and a proposed bill amendment which has been shared with the House and Senate sponsors.

This legislation, if passed into law, requires each first responder and law enforcement officer in the state to complete certain trainings approved by the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission. As currently written, this includes training to: 1) combat the stigma of mental illness; 2) connect individuals with mental illness to mental health services; 3) employ crisis de-escalation techniques; 4) enable early intervention through recognition of signs and symptoms of mental illness; 5) identify individuals with mental illness; and 6) promote mental health literacy.

The Alzheimer's Association proposes that the fifth criterion be amended to read:

“identify and provide care for psychiatric symptoms of Alzheimer's and related dementia, and mental illnesses, which shall include: the risks of wandering, elder abuse, and best practices for interacting with individuals experiencing symptoms of dementia;”

This amendment—and spelling out impacts of ‘Alzheimer's disease and related dementia’ in the bill—is necessary provision to strengthen this bill, as care for the over 1,100 Marylanders with Alzheimer's and dementia is complicated, who often have multiple chronic conditions. They forget family members and societal norms, and their actions may result in false reports of victimization, indecent exposure, and shoplifting. Six in 10 people with dementia will wander, and they may not remember their name or address—and can become disoriented, even in familiar places.

Individuals with Alzheimer's and dementia—who had over \$1.1 billion in Medicaid costs last year in Maryland alone--present a more specific concern and often a more dire concern, than the bill's otherwise blanket requirement for ‘mental illness’ training requires.

I urge a favorable report on this legislation, with the proposed amendment be included in the final version of this legislation. Thank you.

Eric Colchamiro
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