



Position of the Alzheimer's Association, Greater Maryland and National Capital Area chapters on

Senate Bill 454: Public Safety – Mandatory Mental Health Training – First Responders and Law Enforcement Officers

Position: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT

February 13, 2020

Dear Chairman Smith and Vice Chair Waldstreicher:

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 Senate bill 454; today, I offer the Alzheimer's Association's support for this legislation, and a proposed bill amendment.

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 with the following language, which has been shared with the bill sponsors in both chambers:

“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 because over 1,100 Marylanders die from Alzheimer's annually, which cost our state \$1.17 billion in Medicaid dollars last year. And it is necessary because one in three seniors currently dies with Alzheimer's disease or another dementia.

As the bill suggests, care for individuals with Alzheimer's and dementia is complicated, as they 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 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 SB 454, and ask that this amendment be included in the final version of this legislation. Thank you.

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