



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

SB 501 – Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Physicians and Physician Assistants – Administration and Funding

Position: SUPPORT

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February 13, 2020

Dear Chairman Pinsky and Vice-Chair Kagan,

This letter is in support of SB 501: Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Physicians and Physician Assistants, sponsored by Senators Griffith and Hershey. This legislation includes provisions which: transfers oversight of the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program to the Department of Health; requires an annual report on the program; and restores funding to at least \$750,000, to support additional medical specialists in high need areas.

There are currently over 110,000 Marylanders, and countless other caregivers, who face the cruel impacts of Alzheimer's Disease and related dementia. That number is expected to grow by over 18 percent in the next five years. As our state faces this dramatic increase, there is a significant shortage of medical specialists—including geriatricians—to care for them.

Geriatricians are primary care physicians who have additional training in geriatrics, and are typically prepared to manage multiple chronic conditions. Only a small percentage of healthcare professionals enter geriatrics because of the extra years of training required, and its comparatively low reimbursement rates to other medical specialties, as Medicare is typically its primary payer (as opposed to traditional private healthcare insurance). With the heavy burden of student loan debt medical students face upon graduation, there are disincentives to choose a career in geriatrics, and a workforce gap has emerged.

The Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program (MLARP) can make a difference and encourage more geriatricians to be educated in Maryland, and stay in Maryland to provide care. It will make a difference because MLARP awardees allows providers to practice in a rural or medically underserved area (MUA); there are 46 MUAs in Maryland, which are based on factors including a high number of senior citizens. As one out of three seniors dies of dementia, incentives for geriatric care in areas where they are concentrated matter.

I urge a favorable report on SB 501. If you have any questions, please contact our Director of Government Relations Eric Colchamiro at ercolchamiro@alz.org.

Sincerely,

Cass Naugle
Executive Director
Alzheimer's Association, Greater Maryland Chapter