



COMMISSION ON AGING

February 2, 2017

Delegate Shane E. Pendergrass
House Office Building
6 Bladen Street, Room 241
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: HB 147

Dear Delegate Pendergrass:

I write on behalf of the Montgomery County Commission on Aging in support of HB 147, which would establish the Healthy Aging Program in the Maryland Department of Aging. The Commission recognizes the value of health promotion programs for older adults and appreciates the Department of Aging's efforts to enhance and expand them. The Commission supports HB147 and urges that any such health awareness initiatives include oral health care.

In September 2016, the Commission published the findings of a summer study examining the state of oral health care for older adults in Montgomery County. Among the challenges facing seniors revealed by the study are:

- The majority of older adults lack dental insurance, and thus do not see a dentist on a regular basis.
- As adults age, teeth become less sensitive to pain, potentially leading to a delay in care and more advanced disease. In addition, older adults often take medications that mask pain.
- The majority of persons who develop mouth cancers are seniors. Mouth cancer usually has no or minimal symptoms.
- Wait times and neglect can lead to oral caries that require specialized treatment, *e.g.* root canals, which many older adults cannot afford. In addition, there is limited funding and infrastructure available to provide dentures and replacement teeth.
- There is a disconnect between medical care and dental care in both the safety-net and regular health care system.
- Nursing facilities require that residents receive only one oral health check per year. Assisted living facilities have no oral health care requirements. Many older residents cannot brush their teeth independently, and/or they forget to brush their teeth.
- Neither Medicare nor Medicaid provide dental coverage for adults.

These findings point to the need for education around oral health, and comprehensive and coordinated dental services to assist low-income adults, including vulnerable seniors, in navigating services. For these reasons, we support HB 147 and urge that oral health be included as part of the Department of Aging's health promotion activities and initiatives.

Sincerely,

Noelle Heyman
Chair, Montgomery County Commission on Aging.

cc: Leslie Frey
John J. Kenney
Secretary Rona Kramer