

HB 202 – Public Health – Social Isolation and Loneliness Pilot Grant Program

House Health Committee

February 10, 2026

Position: SUPPORT

Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of HB 202.

HB 202 would establish a pilot grant program to provide funds to organizations to maintain or expand programs that support populations at risk for social isolation and loneliness. Older Marylanders are especially at risk.

In 2023, a national poll reported that about 37% of older US adults (aged 50-80 years) experienced loneliness and 34% reported feeling socially isolated.¹ Research has linked social isolation to higher risks for a variety of physical and mental health conditions, including heart disease, obesity, anxiety, depression, cognitive decline, and Alzheimer's disease, while improved social connection is associated with increased longevity and better social, emotional, and physical well-being.²

HB 202 could serve to reduce feelings of social isolation and improve both the physical and mental health of older adults. The size of the grants would be small, but there are several very low-cost programs that have been shown to reduce feelings of loneliness in older adults. Peer programs have an evidence-base and not only help the person who is experiencing feelings of social isolation, but also the older adult peers who are providing connection and support.

For this reason, MHAMD supports HB 202 and urges a favorable report.

¹ Lauren B. Gerlach. Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults. JAMA (2024).

<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2819153>

² Social isolation, loneliness in older adults pose health risks. National Institute on Aging (April 2019).

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/news/social-isolation-loneliness-older-people-pose-health-risks>