



To: House Committee on Human Services

From: Paige Spence, Washington County Government Relations Manager

Date: February 8, 2021

Re: Support for HB 2394

Dear Chair Williams and Committee Members:

Washington County's Division of Disability, Aging, and Veteran Services (DAVS) thanks the sponsors and supports HB 2394. This is an important measure to address social isolation, which we know during COVID-19 continues to be a secondary health risk for older adults.

Throughout the pandemic, DAVS has provided "How to Zoom" free workshops to hundreds of local area older adults. We began a support by text program providing weekly tips, events and encouragement for family caregivers. We are also offering a variety of programs online, including Virtual Age Café, where isolated older adults come together in a virtual setting to share meaningful conversation and connection over Zoom; Gentle Conversations, dementia-friendly videoconferencing creative engagement program for older adults living with dementia and their caregivers; plus exercise, meditation, and the like. We cannot understate how meaningful these programs have been to the people we serve and those who care about them.

Having few social connections and feeling isolated have been associated with myriad health-related conditions. Although the immediate demand for COVID-19 screening, testing and treatment has made it more difficult for health care and aging organizations to reach out to older adults, many still offer opportunities for older adults to engage in a variety of meaningful ways within their homes or communities and to connect with helpful resources, services and programs. We support requiring the listed facilities to ensure older adults can keep making social connections that prevent loneliness and isolation, given the success we have seen first-hand through Washington County programs and services.

We would like to note that some facilities may not have staff capacity to manage the technical aspects of communication for their residents. We have been working with our long-term care ombudsman to identify facilities that may not have proper technology in place to offer connectivity via tablets, smart phones, video chat platforms, and other avenues. We would encourage discussion and proposed solutions in this area.

Thank you for considering this bill and Washington County's testimony.

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