



IN SUPPORT OF THE FOLLOWING BILLS UNDER CONSIDERATION BY THE JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON AGING AND INDEPENDENCE

June 24, 2025

Dignity Alliance Massachusetts is pleased to offer our support for legislation under review by the committee today. In particular, we strongly support S481/H796, An Act to establish the office of older adult advocate, and S491, An Act to improve the resilience of older adults and people with disabilities during public health, environmental, and technological emergencies.

- **S481/H796, An Act to establish the office of older adult advocate**

While Massachusetts was one of the first states to establish a cabinet level office of elder affairs (now called the Executive Office of Aging and Independence), the concerns of older adults extend well beyond the programs within the purview of the Secretary. When the office was established in 1974, the then-Secretary of Elder Affairs was a full participant in the Governor's Cabinet. Although the General Laws (Chapter 19A) still mention the Secretary as part of the Cabinet, recent state administrations have treated the position as subordinate to the Secretary of Health and Human Services.¹

¹ [Chapter 19A](#)

Even if the Governor were to treat the Secretary of Aging and Independence as a Cabinet member (as the law provides), the limitations on the duties of the position precludes the important role that older adults deserve to play at the highest levels of state government. The Legislature has recognized this lack of effective voice for children, by creating the Office of Child Advocate (C.18C MGL), and for Veterans by creating the Office of Veterans Advocate (Chapter 115B). Both of those positions are relatively independent of the administration and serve as a sort of “inspector general” to address issues that cut across the state bureaucracy and provide a critical role in elevating issues and programs important to their constituencies.

Governor Healey has issued Executive Order 642 Instituting Age-Friendly Practices, with the goal of making Massachusetts state government more age-friendly, and directs all cabinet agencies to provide a list of programs under their jurisdiction that benefit older adults. However, the Executive Office of Aging and Independence has no clear authority to monitor these activities. An Older Adult advocate, that is quasi-independent, would be an ideal office to provide government-wide oversight of the executive order.²

- **S491, An Act to improve the resilience of older adults and people with disabilities during public health, environmental, and technological emergencies.**

While everyone is at risk during a natural weather-related disaster or similar emergency, older adults can be especially vulnerable during these challenging times. Being prepared in advance can literally mean the difference between survival and death, particularly for those who may have special medical or mobility needs. Read on to learn more about safety planning steps to consider now, whether you plan to remain at home or be evacuated in the event of an emergency

Older adults often face unique challenges during emergencies due to factors such as limited mobility, medical needs, and isolation. They may rely on a single relative as their main caregiver, but emergencies can happen at any time, and that person may not be available. It is crucial for older adults to have a list of people they can call on and know how to get hold of them. Additionally, having a medical alert bracelet or pendant can be life-saving, especially for those with medical conditions or allergies.² Emergency preparedness for older adults involves assessing their specific needs, creating a personalized plan, and engaging their network of family, friends, and caregivers. They should also be aware of the types of disasters that could affect their area and plan how to respond in both evacuation and shelter-in-place scenarios.³ We recommend that the

² [No. 642: Instituting Age-Friendly Practices | Mass.gov](#)

³ [Nursing Homes Reported Wide-Ranging Challenges Preparing for Public Health Emergencies and Natural Disasters | Office of Inspector General | Government Oversight | U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#)

Committee and staff review the report of the US HHS Inspector General entitled, “Nursing Homes Reported Wide-Ranging Challenges for Public Health Emergencies and Natural Disasters.”

- **Dignity Alliance also supports the other bills listed below. However, we suggest that the several bills related to a commission could be combined.**

Bill No.	Sponsor	Title
H756	Ayers, Bruce J. (HOU)	An Act increasing the penalties for unfair and deceptive actions perpetrated against persons with disabilities and senior citizens
H757	Chan, Tackey (HOU)	An Act relative to mandatory reporting of elder abuse
H758	Chan, Tackey (HOU)	An Act relative to providing dental care to senior citizens
H769	Gregoire, Danielle W. (HOU)	An Act to improve care and prepare for the new era of Alzheimer’s and dementia
H775	Lawn, Jr., John J. (HOU)	An Act establishing a commission on aging disabled adults
H786	Nguyen, Tram T. (HOU)	An Act protecting vulnerable elders from abuse
H787	Reid, Sean (HOU)	An Act establishing a special commission to investigate and study the feasibility of dedicated senior shelters in Massachusetts
H788	Robertson, David Allen (HOU)	An Act to ensure senior care organization quality and accountability
H792	Stanley, Thomas M. (HOU)	An Act establishing a special commission on a statewide long-term services and supports benefit program
H1352	Boldyga, Nicholas (HOU)	An Act establishing a prescription drug rebate program for seniors
H796	Ultrino, Steven (HOU)	An Act to establish the office of older adult advocate
S466	Elridge, James B. (SEN)	An Act protecting vulnerable elders from abuse
S467	Finegold, Barry R. (SEN)	An Act ensuring senior care organization quality and accountability
S468	Gomez, Adam (SEN)	An Act to improve care and prepare for the new era of Alzheimer’s and dementia
S476	Jehlen, Patricia J. (SEN)	An Act establishing a special commission on a statewide long-term services and supports benefit program

S481	Mark, Paul W. (SEN)	An Act to establish the Office of Older Adult Advocate
S490	Tarr, Bruce E. (SEN)	An Act relative to family visitation with a vulnerable adult
S491	Tarr, Bruce E. (SEN)	An Act to improve resilience in older adults and people with disabilities during public health, environmental or technological emergencies

Dignity Alliance Massachusetts is dedicated to transformative change to ensure the dignity of older adults, people with disabilities, and their caregivers. We are committed to advancing new ways of providing long-term services, support, living options, and care, while respecting choice and self-determination. Through education, legislation, regulatory reform, and legal strategies, this mission will become reality throughout the Commonwealth. As a non-profit, all-volunteer, grass-roots coalition of aging and disability service and advocacy organizations and supporters, Dignity Alliance Massachusetts works to secure fundamental change. For more information on the proposed amendments to the above legislation, please contact: Former Senator Richard T. Moore, Legislative Chair, at rmoores8743@charter.net or visit the Dignity Alliance web site. info@dignityAllianceMA.org