New Hampshire State Commission on Aging

117 Pleasant St Dolloff Building 4th Floor Concord NH, 03301

March 25, 2026

SB 454: Requiring the Department of Health and Human Services to update existing public health outreach programs by incorporating information to aid public understanding and awareness of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias

Chair MacDonald and Members of the Health, Human Services and Elderly Affairs Committee,

The New Hampshire State Commission on Aging supports SB 454.

Over the past year and a half, the Commission has conducted extensive community engagement as part of developing a multi-sector plan for aging in New Hampshire. This work included 43 professional focus groups and interviews with more than 300 providers who primarily serve older adults. Additionally, 37 focus groups, community meetings, and listening sessions were held in every county across the state. Through this process, we gathered data on both the strengths and the challenges related to aging well in New Hampshire.

Our findings show that the top priorities for older adults and the professionals who serve them are housing, transportation, and cognitive wellness.

Providers report increasing rates of social isolation and cognitive decline among older adults. Community members—even those who are currently active—express significant concern about potential future loneliness. Because our engagement focused on individuals participating in public or social settings, it is likely that those who are already isolated were underrepresented, suggesting the true extent of isolation is even greater.

Three closely related mental and cognitive health concerns emerged strongly from our listening sessions, forums, and survey data:

- **Dementia and related cognitive decline:** Social workers report rising dementia rates, particularly among under-resourced populations. Dementia complicates housing stability, healthcare management, and access to services.
- **Social isolation:** Both a cause and consequence of cognitive decline and depression, isolation intensifies mental health challenges. Older adults emphasize the importance of maintaining social connections, especially after they stop driving. Engagement is limited by factors such as lack of transportation, limited income, and insufficient social and recreational opportunities, particularly in rural areas.

- **Mental health and memory care supports:** 77% percent of survey respondents rate mental health and memory care supports as important. Among respondents under age 55, that figure increases to 81%, which may reflect the concerns of individuals involved in caregiving for older adults.

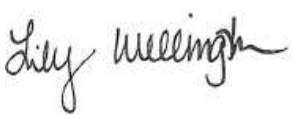
New Hampshire's demographic trends underscore the importance of supporting brain health:

• 26.7% of residents are age 60 or older; 19% are 65 or older
• By 2030, more than 30% of the state's population will be age 65+
• Households headed by someone in their 80s will double by 2040
• Declining birth rates mean older adults will make up an even larger share of the population in future decades
• 25.5% of older adults live alone, increasing the risks associated with social isolation and reducing natural supports

SB 454 will help ensure that older adults, caregivers, and providers have timely access to accurate, up-to-date information related to Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. Improving public awareness and understanding is a necessary step toward supporting individuals and communities as New Hampshire continues to experience a rapid and lasting demographic shift.

The Commission on Aging is a legislative body established to advise the Governor and the General Court on aging-related issues, in recognition of this profound and permanent transformation in the state's age structure.

Respectfully,



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