

REMARKS TO NINTH ANNUAL SPRING ASSEMBLY OF
STATE, COUNTY AND CITY COMMISSIONS ON THE
AGING, STATE HOUSE, ANNAPOLIS

May 15, 1968

May I extend a warm welcome and my most cordial greetings to the delegates of this Ninth Spring Assembly. For many of you the surroundings are familiar; for all of you today's subject is familiar and of vital importance. I share your interest in the problems of the aging. I share your concern and your confidence that much can be done to assure place and participation, health and honor to our senior citizens.

One valid measure of a society's quality and compassion is the respect and care provided its elderly citizens. While America's critics often decry its youth-orientation, the fact is that never before in our nation's history have we ever had so many senior citizens. Nearly one-tenth of America's 200 million citizens have reached the age of sixty or over, and the number increases by approximately one thousand every day. Since the beginning of the century, advances in knowledge and medical science have increased America's average life expectancy from 49 to 70 years.

Women who are 65 now can expect to live sixteen more years; men 65 years old can expect to live at least thirteen additional years. And now that we're reaching the era of the transplant, some may expect that, barring an unforeseen accident, we can live forever!

Seriously, the unprecedented advances in medicine, in health services and in the field of geriatrics present a clear challenge to our society. The challenge was best expressed by our late President Kennedy when he said: "It is not enough for a great nation merely to have added new years to life — our objective must also be to add new life to those years."

We have made progress toward this objective both as a nation and as a State, but much still remains to be done. All too often the "golden age" fails to fulfill its promise. In many cases we have neglected the opportunity to utilize the skill and time of our senior citizens for the betterment of our communities. In many instances, we have failed to provide our elderly with the security, the respect and the recognition every human being needs.