

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2013 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Revised

House Bill 957

(Delegate Rosenberg, *et al.*)

Environmental Matters

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

**Housing - Accessible Housing for Senior Homeowners, Older Adults, and
Individuals with Disabilities**

This bill establishes an Accessible Homes for Senior Homeowners Grant Program in the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). The bill also requires the Maryland Department of Aging (MDoA), the Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD) DHCD, and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) to collaborate to provide a coordinated system of information and access for older adults and individuals with disabilities, including studying the feasibility of instituting an option counselors program administered by the Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) in MDoA. The bill also establishes a reporting requirement for MDoA.

The provisions of the bill relating to inter-agency cooperation and the option counselors program terminate September 30, 2016.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Overall funding for the Special Loans Program Fund in DHCD is not affected. Any increase in demand for financing assistance through the grant program results in a smaller percentage of applicants being served by the program. It is assumed that MDoA, MDOD, DHCD, and DHMH can implement the bill with existing budgeted resources. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: Although local Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) in affected counties benefit from training provided to their option counselors, the bill is not anticipated to materially affect local finances.

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The Special Loans Program Fund may include appropriations from the State for the grant program established under the bill. The fund is authorized to make grants under the Maryland Rehabilitation Program, which is expanded to include the Accessible Homes for Senior Homeownership Grant Program. DHCD is also authorized to issue grants (rather than only loans, under current law) under the Maryland Housing Rehabilitation Program and the Regular Rehabilitation Program.

DHCD is also authorized to make program loans in the form of a grant under the Maryland Housing Rehabilitation Program to a family of limited income if the family owns and occupies the dwelling and DHCD determines the family cannot undertake the rehabilitation project without a grant. A program loan in the form of a grant may be unsecured or secured by a mortgage, deed of trust, or other security device acceptable to DHCD.

Accessible Homes for Senior Homeowners Grant Program

An Accessible Homes for Senior Homeowners Grant Program is established within DHCD to make grants to finance accessibility-related renovation or repair activities for elderly homeowners. DHCD may establish standards to determine the eligibility of an applicant under the program; however, an applicant must provide to DHCD evidence that the applicant cannot undertake the renovation and repairs without a grant. Grants made under the program may be made in conjunction with other accessible housing for seniors loans and other special loan programs administered by DHCD. The department may require that all or part of a grant made under the program be repaid if conditions specified by the department occur.

MDoA, MDOD, DHCD, and DHMH must work collaboratively so as to provide a coordinated system of information and access for older adults and individuals with disabilities by (1) developing information; (2) expanding the Uniform Home Safety Checklist; (3) studying the feasibility of instituting an option counselors program administered by ADRC in MDoA; and (4) providing training materials on accessible housing programs and services that will be used by the option counselors in the ADRC Program.

The training materials developed must be designed to ensure that an option counselor will have a well-developed knowledge of (1) the local, State, and federal resources available to help homeowners who are older adults and individuals with disabilities with home repair and renovation needs; (2) how to listen to and counsel homeowners who are older adults and individuals with disabilities; and (3) how to assist those individuals in applying for specific housing, loan, or grant programs.

The counseling provided by the ADRC Program on accessible housing programs and services must be statewide, with particular attention given to specified communities with concentrations of low-income elderly homeowners.

By January 1 of each year, MDoA must also report to the Governor and the General Assembly on the operation and performance of accessible housing services counseling provided by the ADRC Program.

Current Law: The Maryland Housing Rehabilitation Program within DHCD provides financing assistance for the acquisition and rehabilitation of single- and multifamily rental buildings. The purpose of the program is to preserve and improve single-family properties and one-to-four unit rental properties. The program is designed to bring these properties up to applicable building codes and standards. DHCD is authorized to make program loans for housing on terms that DHCD considers necessary to make the housing affordable to families of limited income, as specified.

Background: Chapter 695 of 2012 (HB 991) required DHCD to establish a task force to study and report on, among other things, methods for (1) understanding the needs of low-income seniors regarding home repairs, safety, and energy savings; (2) identifying existing and new public resources on the federal, State, and local levels to assist low-income and limited-income senior homeowners with home renovation and repairs; and (3) identifying the challenges for low-income and limited-income senior homeowners in accessing public resources. This bill encompasses some of the recommendations made by the task force.

Since 2006, DHCD, in partnership with MDoA, has undertaken an Accessible Homes for Seniors Program to facilitate accessibility related improvements to the homes of seniors. These improvements may include, among others, the installation of grab bars and railings, the widening of doorways, and the installation of ramps. Home improvements such as these represent for many older people the key to remaining in their homes and maintaining their independence.

The program provides 0% interest, deferred *loans* for a term of 30 years to finance accessibility improvements. The program is funded by DHCD under the Maryland Housing Rehabilitation Program and is marketed through local AAAs. Funds may be used to pay for the actual costs of making the house accessible or functional for the resident. This may include, but is not limited to, widening doorways and installation of accessible showers, ramps, grab bars, and lever handles.

Maryland Department of Aging

MDoA has the responsibility for administering community-based long-term care programs and services for older Marylanders, evaluating services they need, and determining the extent to which public and private programs meet those needs. The department also administers the ADRC Program, known as Maryland Access Point (MAP). ADRC is a national initiative to realign long-term care information and access resources into a single point of entry system.

The department administers the MAP program through collaborative partnerships with State and local aging and disability agencies and stakeholders. With input from local AAAs, seniors, caregivers, MDOD, and other sister agencies, the department establishes priorities for meeting the needs of older Marylanders and advocates for frail and vulnerable seniors and expansion of the MAP program. The fiscal 2014 State budget includes \$15.5 million in State grants and \$21.8 million in federal grants to local AAAs.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Housing and Community Development, Maryland Department of Aging, Maryland Department of Disabilities, Department of Legislative Services

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Analysis by: Stephen M. Ross

Direct Inquiries to:
(410) 946-5510
(301) 970-5510