

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2021 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 751 (Charles County Senators)
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Southern Maryland - Human Relations Commission

This bill authorizes the county commissioners of a code home rule county of the Southern Maryland class (*i.e.*, Charles County) to establish a human relations commission for the county. The provisions establishing and governing the proposed Charles County Human Relations Commission are similar to those for the existing human relations commission in St. Mary's County.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill does not directly affect State operations or finances.

Local Effect: None. The bill is authorizing in nature and does not materially affect Charles County government finances.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: Section 29-101 of the Local Government Article defines "commission" as the St. Mary's County Human Relations Commission.

Under current law, the St. Mary's County Commissioners are authorized to establish a human relations commission for the county whose purposes are to (1) promote understanding and harmony of relationship among the people of the county through the study of the nature and causes of social friction and prejudice; (2) advance the means for the alleviation of social friction and prejudice; and (3) further the American ideal of

equality and justice. The St. Mary's County Commissioners are authorized to appropriate money for the administrative support of the commission.

The St. Mary's County Commissioners must (1) determine the size of the commission; (2) appoint the members of the commission; and (3) ensure that the membership of the commission reflects the diversity of the people of the county.

Members serve on the commission for four years and their terms must be staggered in a manner determined by the St. Mary's County Commissioners. The members must select a chair and a vice chair who serve for a period of one year. The members are not authorized to serve as the chair and vice chair for more than two consecutive terms or to receive compensation as members of the commission.

The human relations commission is authorized to (1) provide advice and assistance related to the filing and processing of grievances and complaints of discrimination with the appropriate federal and State agencies; (2) educate the community on the rights and responsibilities of people relating to housing, employment, and public accommodations; (3) advocate for the removal of all vestiges of discrimination; and (4) assist in nonbinding alternative dispute resolution. The commission must use its influence and persuasion to direct the efforts of the community to solving problems that many times are the basic reasons for racial tensions. In addition, the commission must encourage and ensure equal treatment of all people, without regard to race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, age, marital status, or physical or mental disability in compliance with federal, State, and local laws and regulations related to housing, employment, and public accommodations.

The commission must hold confidential any information and records obtained by a predecessor county body that was authorized to perform a function similar to that of the commission before July 1, 1997. The commission must file with the St. Mary's County Commissioners a comprehensive report of its activities at least once every 12 months; however, the commission is not authorized to reveal any confidential information in the report to the county commissioners.

Forms of County Governments in Maryland

Maryland counties operate under three forms of government: commission; charter home rule; and code home rule. Charles County is currently the only Southern Maryland county with a code home rule form of government. **Exhibit 1** shows the form of government for each Maryland county.

Exhibit 1
Forms of County Governments in Maryland

<u>Charter</u>	<u>Commission</u>	<u>Code</u>
Anne Arundel	Calvert	Allegany
Baltimore	Carroll	Caroline
Cecil	Garrett	Charles
Dorchester	St. Mary's	Kent
Frederick	Somerset	Queen Anne's
Harford	Washington	Worcester
Howard		
Montgomery		
Prince George's		
Talbot		
Wicomico		

Source: Department of Legislative Services

Local Fiscal Effect: Charles County government indicates that the bill will not have a fiscal impact on county finances. The current human relations commission in St. Mary's County is allocated \$1,850 in the county budget for both fiscal 2020 and 2021. The commission actually spent \$1,393 in fiscal 2019.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Designated Cross File: HB 1081 (Charles County Delegation) - Environment and Transportation.

Information Source(s): Maryland Commission on Civil Rights; Charles and St. Mary's counties; Office of the Attorney General; Department of Legislative Services

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md/tso

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