

Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2021 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
 Enrolled - Revised

Senate Bill 846
 Finance

(Senator Benson)

Economic Matters

Home Energy Assistance - Critical Medical Needs Program - Power to the People Pilot Program

This bill requires the Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP), in coordination with the United Way of Central Maryland and the Fuel Fund of Maryland, to establish the Power to the People Pilot Program by July 1, 2022. The pilot program will expand access to the Critical Medical Needs (CMN) Program and provide training for 2-1-1 Maryland United Way Helpline intake specialists and case managers to serve as navigators. The Governor must include in the fiscal 2023 and 2024 annual budget bill \$80,000 to OHEP for the pilot program. Funds must be used to hire specified staff. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2021, and terminates June 30, 2025.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General fund expenditures increase by \$80,000 in FY 2023 and 2024 only to reflect the mandated appropriation to the pilot program. Revenues are not affected. **This bill establishes a mandated appropriation in FY 2023 and 2024.**

(in dollars)	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	0	80,000	80,000	0	0
Net Effect	\$0	(\$80,000)	(\$80,000)	\$0	\$0

Note:() = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate increase; (-) = indeterminate decrease

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The United Way of Central Maryland must establish a screening intake process to identify callers to the 2-1-1 Maryland United Way helpline who may be critical medically vulnerable individuals. Intake specialists must (1) conduct basic screening to determine whether the caller is a critical medically vulnerable individual; (2) assist critical medically vulnerable individuals and their households with applications for energy assistance; and (3) refer individuals who are unable to pay their utility bills to the Fuel Fund of Maryland for additional cash assistance and community resources.

The Fuel Fund of Maryland must coordinate with OHEP and the United Way of Central Maryland to assist critical medically vulnerable individuals with paying any remaining balance owed on their electric, gas, or other energy source bills. The Fuel Fund of Maryland must also provide additional cash assistance and community resources to critical medically vulnerable individuals.

Current Law: The purpose of the CMN program is to reduce barriers to the energy assistance application process for “critical medically vulnerable individuals” and their households in obtaining State and federal financial assistance for their electric, gas, or other energy source bills so that their service continues or is restored.

A “critical medically vulnerable individual” is an individual who:

- has a severe health condition that will be aggravated due to the termination or noncontinuation of electric or gas service or needs the use of life-support equipment as documented and certified in accordance with specified methods;
- has or will have their electric or gas service terminated for nonpayment; and
- is unable to complete the energy assistance applications under available energy assistance programs.

The CMN program must facilitate assistance to critical medically vulnerable individuals and their households in obtaining financial assistance through navigators. Navigators are representatives from a medical facility or from a public or private assistance agency or organization who are in personal contact with a critical medically vulnerable individual and assist the individual in the energy assistance application process. OHEP must determine qualifications and establish training requirements for navigators; it must train navigators or facilitate the training of navigators by others.

Per Maryland regulations, OHEP must work with electric and gas companies to implement, for critical medically vulnerable individuals (1) a medical hold on electric or gas service or an expedited process to grant the extension of electric or gas service for those who will

have services terminated and (2) an expedited process for the restoration of electric or gas service for those who have had their electric or gas service terminated. OHEP must establish a tracking system of the status of individuals who participate in the program and adopt implementing regulations.

Maryland 2-1-1

The three-digit number 2-1-1 is established in statute as the primary information and referral telephone number for health and human services in the State. 2-1-1 Maryland is a private, nonprofit organization that maintains an information and referral service network that is available to Maryland residents via telephone and Internet. 2-1-1 Maryland offers 24/7 guidance in accessing health, crisis, and social services.

State Expenditures: General fund expenditures increase by \$80,000 in fiscal 2023 and 2024 to reflect the mandated appropriation to OHEP for the pilot program. Funds must be used to hire specified staff: one full-time intake specialist and one full-time case manager for the 2-1-1 Maryland United Way Helpline, as well as one part-time project coordinator at the Fuel Fund of Maryland, as specified by the bill.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: HB 938 of 2020 passed the House and Senate but was not enrolled. Its cross file, SB 1024, passed the Senate on second reading with amendments, but no further action was taken.

Designated Cross File: HB 969 (Delegate Carey) - Economic Matters.

Information Source(s): Department of Budget and Management; Department of Human Services; Office of People’s Counsel; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 12, 2021
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