

Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
 First Reader

House Bill 696
 Appropriations

(Delegate Grammer, *et al.*)

State Prescription Drug Benefits - Retirees

This bill restores eligibility for State prescription drug coverage under the State Employee and Retiree Health and Welfare Benefits Program (the State plan) for Medicare-eligible State retirees who began State service before July 1, 2011. It also repeals three supplemental prescription drug reimbursement plans for specified State retirees and makes conforming changes. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: State expenditures (all funds) increase by \$299.4 million in FY 2027 and by similar amounts annually according to actuarial assumptions; a reliable estimate of the fund split is not feasible. No effect on revenues.

(\$ in millions)	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF/SF/FF Exp.	299.4	271.8	300.1	331.3	365.7
Net Effect	(\$299.4)	(\$271.8)	(\$300.1)	(\$331.3)	(\$365.7)

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

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: The State plan is established in statute to provide health insurance and other benefit options to State employees and retirees. The Secretary of Budget and Management is charged with developing and administering the program, including

selecting the insurance options to be offered. Upon their retirement, and provided they receive a retirement allowance from the State Retirement and Pension System, retired State employees may enroll and participate in any of the health insurance options provided by the State plan. Until the enactment of Chapter 397 of 2011, this had allowed retired State employees to retain the same health coverage they had as active employees. In addition, active State employees earn eligibility for a partial State subsidy of the cost of health insurance coverage when they retire.

Health benefits provided to retirees are often referred to as “other postemployment benefits” (OPEB) to distinguish them from pension benefits.

State Retiree Prescription Drug Benefits

Chapter 397 made changes to OPEB coverage provided to State retirees, particularly in the area of prescription drug coverage. First, it authorized the State to establish health insurance benefit options for retirees that differ from those for active State employees. In addition, Chapter 397 increased the share of the premium for prescription drug coverage paid by retirees from 20% to 25% (it remained 20% for active State employees) and raised out-of-pocket (OOP) limits for retirees to \$1,500 for a single retiree and \$2,000 for family drug coverage (previously, the limit had been \$750 for single or family coverage for both active employees and retirees). Finally, it eliminated State prescription drug coverage for Medicare-eligible retirees in fiscal 2020. Fiscal 2020 was the year that improvements to Medicare Part D prescription coverage enacted by the federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) were to be fully phased in, allowing Medicare-eligible retirees to get comparable prescription coverage through Medicare instead of from the State.

In response to the new authority to establish separate coverage for retirees, the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) established a new Employer Group Waiver Plan (EGWP), effective January 1, 2014, to provide prescription drug coverage to Medicare-eligible retirees. EGWPs are authorized under the 2003 Medicare Prescription Drug Modernization Act and essentially “wrap” employer coverage around the Medicare Part D prescription drug coverage. Participating retirees do not have to actively make any change in their coverage because all interactions between the State plan and Medicare are handled administratively.

In accordance with Chapter 397, State prescription drug coverage for Medicare-eligible retirees was to end July 2019. However, because the improvements to Medicare Part D coverage under the ACA were accelerated, and because the State plan year begins on January 1 of each year, Chapter 10 of 2018 (the Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act) accelerated the date coverage would end to January 1, 2019. Chapter 10 also clarified that a non-Medicare-eligible spouse, surviving spouse, dependent child, or surviving dependent child of a Medicare-eligible retiree may remain enrolled in the State prescription drug plan

even if the retiree is no longer eligible. Finally, it required the Secretary of Budget and Management to provide written notice to individuals affected by the change in the State prescription drug plan.

Federal Lawsuit

In response to the notice of the impending expiration of the State prescription drug benefits, several retirees filed a lawsuit in federal District Court challenging the State's action on the grounds that it is an unconstitutional breach of contract. Subsequently, the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Maryland Council 3 filed a similar suit on behalf of active State employees. On October 16, 2018, the court issued a temporary restraining order and preliminary injunction preventing the State from terminating prescription drug coverage for Medicare-eligible retirees until the lawsuit was resolved. As a result, State prescription drug coverage remained in effect for eligible retirees.

On December 30, 2021, the federal District Court judge ruled that State law creates a contractual right to prescription drug benefits for State retirees who retired before January 1, 2019. The ruling further provided that retirees who retired on or after that date, and current active employees, do not have a contractual right to prescription drug benefits under State law. AFSCME appealed the ruling on behalf of active employees to the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals. In February 2023, the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that State law did not create a contractual arrangement between the State and current or future retirees. Following the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeal's decision, in July 2023, the District Court rescinded the injunction against the State affecting coverage for retirees.

Supplemental Prescription Reimbursement Plans

Chapter 767 of 2019 established three prescription drug OOP reimbursement or catastrophic coverage programs for specified State retirees, dependents, or surviving dependents who are enrolled in a Medicare prescription drug benefit plan. The Act provided supplemental reimbursement for OOP prescription drug costs for specified retirees in the event that the State prevailed in the lawsuit and terminated prescription drug coverage for retirees. In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 767, implementation of the programs began January 2025, following the rescission of the federal injunction. *The bill* repeals all of the provisions described in this section.

Chapter 767 required DBM to establish three new prescription drug benefit programs for specified current and future retirees who are enrolled in a Medicare prescription drug benefit plan:

- the Maryland State Retiree Prescription Drug Coverage Program is available only to an individual who (1) retired from the State on or before December 31, 2019; (2) is enrolled in a prescription drug benefit plan under Medicare; and (3) is eligible to enroll and participate in the State plan. It reimburses a participant for OOP prescription drug costs that exceed limits established in the State plan, which are currently \$1,500 for an individual and \$2,000 for a family;
- the Maryland State Retiree Catastrophic Prescription Drug Assistance Program is available to an individual who (1) began State service on or before June 30, 2011; (2) retired on or after January 1, 2020; and (3) is eligible to enroll and participate in the State plan. It reimburses a participant for OOP costs after the participant enters catastrophic coverage under the Medicare drug benefit plan; and
- the Maryland State Retiree Life-Sustaining Prescription Drug Assistance Program, which is provided automatically to an individual who (1) is eligible to enroll and participate in the State plan and (2) is enrolled in either of the two prescription drug cost reimbursement plans described above. It reimburses a participant for OOP costs for a life-sustaining drug that is covered under the State plan but is not covered under the individual's Medicare prescription drug plan.

For all three programs, a participating retiree may elect to cover a spouse and dependent children; surviving spouses and children of retirees are also eligible to participate in the three programs. The three programs may include a health reimbursement account established in accordance with the Internal Revenue Code or another program that provides assistance with prescription drug costs. All three programs may set different OOP limits or reimbursement amounts for retirees or beneficiaries who qualify for a partial State premium subsidy (rather than a full subsidy). Eligible participants may enroll in the Prescription Drug Coverage Program or the Catastrophic Prescription Drug Assistance Program during the open enrollment period or any special enrollment period; if they enroll in either of those programs, they are automatically enrolled in the Life-Sustaining Prescription Drug Assistance Program.

Chapter 767 expressed the intent of the General Assembly that DBM establish the reimbursement programs in a manner that allows retirees to receive reimbursement at the time when they purchase a prescription drug, through a mechanism such as debit cards.

By July 1 of each year, the Secretary of Budget and Management must notify specified individuals of their eligibility to enroll in the programs and provide other specified information. DBM must provide specified one-on-one counseling to Medicare-eligible retirees and provide specified reports to the budget committees.

Implementation of Supplemental Coverage

Following the rescinding of the injunction by the federal court in July 2023, DBM confirmed that State prescription drug coverage for Medicare-eligible retirees would terminate beginning January 1, 2025. Due to changes in the underlying Medicare Part D program, the OOP reimbursement programs were not implemented as enacted. Specifically, the federal Inflation Reduction Act eliminated the “catastrophic coverage” stage and limited OOP prescription drug costs for Medicare participants to \$2,000 per participant. DBM contracted with Via Benefits to provide one-on-one counseling to eligible retirees to help them select and enroll in the most advantageous Medicare Part D plan for their prescription drug needs.

DBM also implemented Health Reimbursement Arrangements (HRAs), which provide State retirees who enroll in a Medicare Part D plan with a debit card to cover the difference between the State’s OOP maximum of \$1,500 and the Medicare maximum of \$2,000. Based on that gap, the minimum amount required for each HRA is \$500, but during the 2024 legislative session, the General Assembly raised that amount to \$750 for calendar 2025; it was subsequently maintained at \$750 for calendar 2026. Married retirees with a Medicare-eligible spouse currently receive \$2,000 in their HRAs. Importantly, HRA recipients can use their reimbursement accounts at any time (*i.e.*, they do not need to reach the \$1,500 OOP maximum before using the HRA funds).

Another difference is that HRAs are available only to individuals hired on or before June 30, 2011, and who retired from State service on or before January 1, 2020. Any retired State employees who retire or have retired after January 1, 2020, are not eligible for HRAs, or any other prescription drug benefit, from the State. HRA benefits began January 1, 2025, for eligible retirees.

The Life-Sustaining Prescription Drug Assistance Program is available to eligible retirees.

State Expenditures: The bill restores – beginning July 1, 2026 – State-subsidized prescription drug coverage for all Medicare-eligible retirees and for all current employees (when they retire) hired before July 1, 2011. DBM advises that 42,656 retirees and beneficiaries have HRAs in calendar 2026 at a total cost of approximately \$36 million; these HRAs are assumed to be fully utilized in calendar 2026.

The State share of costs related to retiree health care is charged against each agency’s budget through a line item that is adjusted annually by DBM based on actual costs. Therefore, this analysis assumes that costs are reflected as increases in State agency budgets and are allocated to all funds (*i.e.*, general funds, special funds, federal funds, higher education funds, and nonbudgeted funds). DBM advises that the amounts charged

in each agency's budget are not necessarily proportional to each fund type's share of State personnel costs, so a reliable estimate of the eventual fund split cannot be made.

The State plan operates on a calendar year basis, so fiscal effects reported by DBM, and its actuary must be adjusted for fiscal years. Based on projections by DBM's health care actuary, total State OPEB liabilities increase by \$10.2 billion over the next 30 years. As a result, State expenditures (all funds) increase by \$299.4 million in fiscal 2027, which accounts for the fiscal effect beginning halfway through calendar 2026. Out-year costs reflect actuarial assumptions. As discussed above, these costs are assumed to be allocated to all funds, but a reliable estimate of the fund split is not feasible.

This estimate does not include any potential costs associated with cancelling the contract with Via Benefits or any savings from potentially cancelling any unspent HRA funds.

Additional Comments: The projected first-year cost for this bill is somewhat higher than that projected for House Bill 356 of 2025, an identical bill. DBM advises that the primary reason for this is higher projected prescription drug costs, which were revised by the actuary for this analysis based on current trends.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has been introduced within the last three years. See HB 356 of 2025 and HB 670 of 2024.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Budget and Management; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - March 16, 2026
jg/ljm

Analysis by: Michael C. Rubenstein

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