



March 11, 2021

## Support of SENATE BILL 907

### Human Services – Critical Medical Needs Program – Application for Assistance

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Maryland Chapter (NASW-MD), we would like to express our support for Senate Bill 907, Human Services – Critical Medical Needs Program – Application for Assistance.

This bill requires the Office of Home Energy Programs to accept applications for the Critical Medical Needs Program from vulnerable older adults who are assisted by a navigator, without requiring the submission of certification from their health care provider. By easing the requirements to enroll in this life-saving program, the bill will allow more seniors to participate.

The individuals who need this program are those who rely on electric or gas service to operate life-sustained equipment such as oxygen systems, nebulizers, mobility devices, Hoyer lifts and other machinery. Many of them live on low, fixed incomes and struggle to meet their basic needs; thus, they are often at risk of a gas or electric turn-off due to inability to pay their utility bills. Even a short-term interruption of power to their homes could result in devastating deterioration in health, or even death. The navigators who work with them are aware of their health conditions and the severity of the emergency that a utility shut-off would create. Thus, it is humane to drop the requirement that these individuals, in addition to working with a navigator, must submit medical documentation, especially since many lack transportation to get to the doctor as often as they need to.

As social workers serving older adults, we so often see frail elders who must choose between buying food and medicine or paying their gas and electric bills. We know an 82-year old woman in Baltimore who uses a nebulizer but must keep her house very cold and cut back on groceries because she can't afford her BGE bill. A 79-year old man in Silver Spring cuts his pills in half so he can have enough money for the electricity that heats his apartment and powers his electric wheelchair. By reducing the barriers for these vulnerable people to participate in the Critical Medical Needs Program, the bill will ease the anxiety that an unexpected expense will result in a catastrophic turn-off and a resulting health emergency. Moreover, this bill will save the lives of struggling older adults.

COVID-19 has highlighted the health inequities facing our most vulnerable Marylanders. Passage of this bill will help a group of seniors who urgently need our support.

We urge you to vote YES on SB 907.

Thank you,

NASW-MD Committee on Aging