



Testimony Before the House Economic Matters Committee

House Bill 998 Human Services - Silver Energy Savers Program and Energy Assistance Fund

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Maryland Chapter (NASW-MD) Committee on Aging, we would like to express our support for House Bill 998 Human Services - Silver Energy Savers Program and Energy Assistance Fund.

As social workers, we support SB 905 because older Marylanders with low incomes need assistance with energy bills. About 55,000 adults over 60 live at or below the poverty line, and many more have incomes just slightly above this stringent standard. Many older Marylanders cannot afford to pay their energy bills. They often cut back on filling prescriptions and buying groceries in order to keep their power on.

When older people cannot adequately heat and cool their homes, they face unique dangers. Older adults do not adjust as well as younger people to temperature extremes and are often less aware of temperature changes. Cold temperatures can exacerbate their health problems. In the summer, elders are more susceptible to heat stress ailments like heat stroke when temperatures soar. In addition, many older adults rely on electricity to operate their medical devices or to refrigerate medicines such as insulin. A home energy interruption can be life-threatening.

The Maryland Energy Assistance Program (MEAP) helps many low-income households with their home energy bills, as well as providing energy crisis assistance and weatherization services. However, many older Marylanders who qualify for MEAP do not know about the program or are unable to apply. Many do not have access to computers, cannot complete the application, or do not have the supporting documents. This bill would provide outreach and assistance to remedy those problems, as well as additional funds to help those over 60.

Older Marylanders living on low incomes need and deserve information and support in order to apply for vital home energy assistance. For that reason, we ask for a favorable report for HB 998.

Respectfully,

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Executive Director, NASW-MD