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**BILL NO.:** Senate Bill 719  
Human Services- Office of Home Energy  
Programs- Uniform Redetermination Process

**COMMITTEE:** Finance

**HEARING DATE:** March 1, 2022

**SPONSOR:** Senator Benson

**POSITION:** Support

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The Office of People's Counsel supports Senate Bill 719.

SB 719 simplifies and standardizes the energy assistance process for seniors 65 years and older. The Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP) has a redetermination process in place for seniors that requires them to reapply to the program with a full application once every three years and states that the applicant must respond to requests for additional documentation within 15 days. These requirements create barriers for seniors. The application and document gathering process is arduous, especially if there are mobility or transportation issues that stop them from being able to get to a local OHEP office for assistance. Many seniors live on a fixed income and their eligibility for the program typically does not change. Having someone on a fixed income regularly reapply results in vulnerable households losing their benefit and produces an unnecessary administrative burden on OHEP to process these applications.

SB 719 would require seniors 65 and older to only apply to OHEP with a full application one time, and then moving forward they would receive a post card asking them to verify that there was no change in income or household profile. This bill would also allow these applicants 45 days to respond to requests for additional documentation instead of 15 days under current law. Implementing these two changes statewide would simplify the process for both the applicant and OHEP. Most importantly, removing these barriers for low-income seniors in Maryland would help to keep their home energy bills affordable.

**Recommendation:** OPC requests a favorable report from the Committee on SB 719.