

sb905pdf.pdf

Uploaded by: Cindy Carter

Position: FAV



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Email: info@cancersupportfoundation.org

www.cancersupportfoundation.org

Finance

SB905

Support

March 1, 2022

Cindy Carter
Cancer Support Foundation

Good afternoon, madam chair Kelly and committee. I am Cindy Carter Co-Founder of the Critical Medical Needs Program, Founder of the Power to the People Program and Executive Director of Cancer Support Foundation. I am here today in favor of SB905 Silver Energy Savers Program. This bill provides a program to help our seniors age safely in place keeping their lights and heat on.

Seniors aging in place in Maryland is a big issue that is growing all of the time. Keeping the lights and heat on for our seniors is basic is being able to age safely in their homes.

Office of Home Energy Program (OHEP) is not a customer friendly agency. The pandemic really highlighted the issues with directing people to do the application for grants for lights and heat to be done online. Many of our seniors are unable to work on a computer or understand the system. Many are unable to go to local offices to get assistance, and many are unable to get assistance over the phone.

The application deals with six different grants and is very confusing leading to questions as to what it means as well as what documents are needed to be gathered and go in with the application. Customer service is needed for seniors especially as their health changes creating both physical and mental challenges. Many do not have family support to help get through this process.



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Of those who are eligible for these OHEP grants, 41% are seniors 60 yrs. old and above. Our senior population is growing and without lights and heat grants for many aging in place will be a bigger challenge.

SB905 sets up a Silver Energy Savers Program for those 60yrs and above to get the customer service that is needed to get them through this process. We are working with United Way 211 to facilitate this program from their four locations. You will hear from them. This bill would provide:

- Four locations across the state, Central MD, Southern MD, Eastern Shore, Western MD
- Call centers to help clients through the application understanding and completing
- Call centers to work with client to know what documents need to be gathered
- Communication between the Call Centers and the local OHEP offices to better facilitate the processing of the application and communication back to the client
- Home visits by the local OHEP offices when needed to pick up documents
- Call centers have the ability to get telephone signatures on the applications as major time saving factor. This exists now with Critical medical need Program applicants.
- Call centers to work with clients to from beginning to end and be the front-line contact for the client

Silver Energy Savers Program is a game changer program for our seniors. It is a major step in the right direction to keep them aging safely in place. Getting our seniors into this program helps to address once of the major areas that need to be addressed for our seniors to be safe. I am asking for a favorable report on SB905.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Cindy Carter".

Cindy Carter
Co-Founder Critical Medical Needs Program
Executive Director Cancer Support Foundation, Inc.

SB905-Silver Energy Saver Fund - Finance - CJW - F

Uploaded by: Diana Younts

Position: FAV



Committee: Finance

Testimony on: SB905 - Silver Energy Savers Fund & Energy Assistance Fund

Organization: MLC Climate Justice Wing

Submitting: Diana Younts, Co-Chair

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: March 1, 2022

Dear M. Chair and Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing our testimony today in support of SB905. The MLC Climate Justice Wing, a statewide coalition of over 50 grassroots and professional organizations, urges you to vote favorably.

41% of Marylanders who need energy assistance are Seniors. Because the application process is principally on-line and requires applicants to upload numerous verification documents online to apply for six different grant programs, Seniors who are not tech savvy are utterly defeated by the process. And if these Seniors don't have patient, loving, tech savvy family members they end up not getting the energy assistance they need.

SB905 solves this problem by creating a third-party call system with navigators who personally assist seniors, one-on-one to go through the application process and submit the needed documents to enroll in the program.

We urge you to vote favorably for this thoughtful and caring legislation.

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Uploaded by: Eileen O'Connor-Liebman

Position: FAV

Edward J. Lee, M.D.
Tejaswi R. Sastry, M.D.
Mohit Narang, M.D.
Andrew S. Mener, M.D.
Yousuf A. Gaffar, M.D.
Adam Schuckler, PA-C,MMSc
Laura Hostovich, AOCNP
Yanxia Li, CRNP
Michele Reilly CRNP
Amy Tissiere, LCSW-C, OSW-C



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Finance

SB905 – SUPPORT

February 28th, 2022

Eileen O'Connor-Liebman, Patient Advocate
Maryland Oncology Hematology
10710 Charter Drive, Suite G020
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410-964-2212 Ext. 1136

To: Senator Benson and esteemed members of the Senate Finance Committee

RE: Testimony in Support of SB 905 - OHEP - Silver Energy Savers Program & Energy Assistance Fund

Dear Senator Benson and esteemed members of the Senate Finance Committee:

I am Eileen O'Connor-Liebman, Patient Advocate for Maryland Oncology Hematology in Columbia Maryland writing today in favor of SB905.

The Critical Medical Needs Program (CMNP) started as a Pilot Program in our office in Spring of 2015. We were beyond excited and honored to be a part of the process when it was passed into law in Spring of 2019. This program is a successful partnership between state agencies, utility companies, trained navigators and non-profits.

Silver Energy Savers Program & Energy Assistance Fund SB905 would allow seniors who are not able to ambulate well or at all; seniors who do not have access to internet nor are able to navigate the system since they are not technology savvy call in and speak to a human on the telephone. That one-on-one assistance to help them enroll in OHEP applications is priceless. Patients feel so defeated when they attempt to navigate the system to get the much-deserved help they need and qualify for and fail due to a broken system. This would be a significant benefit for seniors as many of them really struggle with the application & gathering of documents. It is also extremely difficult for them to get to a local OHEP office. The last several applications that I have helped process were patients over 65 years of age. You can hear the frustration, embarrassment and overwhelmingness in their voice when helping them navigate the system. Many of our seniors are often being cared for by various family members at different times and that scenario makes it incredibly difficult to maneuver. The **Silver Energy Savers Program & Energy Assistance Fund** will help the most vulnerable residents across the state apply for the energy assistance grants that are available for those who qualify. SB905 is a necessary and vital component that will help our most vulnerable, our seniors. We are in support and are asking for a favorable report on SB905.

Sincerely,



Eileen O'Connor-Liebman, Patient Advocate

SB905 OPC support.pdf

Uploaded by: Endia Montgomery

Position: FAV

DAVID S. LAPP
PEOPLE'S COUNSEL

WILLIAM F. FIELDS
DEPUTY PEOPLE'S COUNSEL

JOSEPH G. CLEAVER
DEPUTY PEOPLE'S COUNSEL

————— OPC —————
OFFICE OF PEOPLE'S COUNSEL
State of Maryland

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BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21202
WWW.OPC.MARYLAND.GOV

BRANDI NIELAND
DIRECTOR, CONSUMER
ASSISTANCE UNIT

BILL NO.: Senate Bill 905
Human Services- Silver Energy Savers Program
and Energy Assistance Fund

COMMITTEE: Finance

HEARING DATE: March 1, 2022

SPONSOR: Senator Benson

POSITION: Support

The Office of People's Counsel supports Senate Bill 905.

SB 905 establishes a third-party energy assistance enrollment phone number for seniors 60 years and older that provides one-on-one telephonic help through the Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP) application process. Currently, OHEP encourages people to apply for assistance online or in-person at a local office. For many seniors, these options create barriers to needed benefits. Not all seniors are tech-savvy and may struggle to fill out the online application and upload the required documents. Mobility, health, and transportation issues arise for many seniors, making the trip to their local OHEP office for assistance sometimes impossible. The application and document gathering process can be confusing and difficult without help.

SB 905 would set up a new "front door" for seniors to be able to access energy assistance through OHEP. The senior would work one-on-one with an expert who will help them fill out the application, gather documents, request home visits from OHEP as needed, and troubleshoot any issues with their application throughout the process. This new system would ensure that seniors do not fall through the cracks and are able to apply to benefits they need to keep their home energy bills affordable.

Recommendation: OPC requests a favorable report from the Committee on SB 905.

SB905:HB998 final.pdf

Uploaded by: Laurel Peltier

Position: FAV

HB998 / SB905

For Seniors 60+



NEW Inbound Telephone Energy Assistance Enrollment

Problem:

Many OHEP "front door" access barriers for seniors

- Heavy DHS reliance on internet MD Think OHEP application.
- Difficult to get real human help on telephone.
- Most seniors aren't technology-savvy
- Many can't get to local "OHEP" offices.
- Uploading verification documents nearly impossible

Solution:

- Use a third-party to take inbound calls from seniors ages 60+ to enroll and follow-up with incomplete OHEP applications over the phone.
- Offer one-on-one assistance for senior 60+ clients to understand required documents and application and successfully enroll into OHEP system.

Hearings:

House sponsor: Delegate Carey, ECM hearing March 3rd 1pm

**Senate sponsor: Sen. Benson, Senate Finance March 1st,
3pm**

HB998/SB905

How is this bill a solution?

Creates a new inbound telephone help-line for seniors 60 yrs.+ to get the real help they need to apply for energy assistance grants to make home energy bills more affordable

Broad stakeholder working group collaborating since May 2021.
(Utilities, state agencies, non-profits and other organizations.)

Problem:

- Forty-one percent of 400,000 eligible households for energy assistance grants ("OHEP") are 60 yrs. and older.
- There are many barriers to getting these grants.
- Pandemic really brought to light the challenges that seniors have in getting through the process.
- Seniors need extra help which this program would provide.
- Seniors need to be re enrolled each year in the program without having to do a new application which this program provides.
- Tricky application (6 different grants!) and ID, social security cards, income verification and utility bill needed.

We need your support for Maryland seniors!

For more information contact Cindy Carter
Co-founder of Critical Medical Needs Program
(passed into law 2019)

410-964-9563

cpcarter@aol.com

SB905-FAVORABLE-Peltier.pdf

Uploaded by: Laurel Peltier

Position: FAV

SB905
FAVORABLE TESTIMONY

SENATE SPONSOR: Benson

SENATE FINANCE HEARING: MARCH 1, 2022

FROM: ENERGY ADVOCATES COALITION, L. PELTIER

SILVER LIGHTS ENERGY SAVERS INBOUND TELEPHONE SERVICE

Under the *Silver Energy Savers Program* brand name, this important bill would fund four people to consistently answer the telephone for seniors 60+ and to help apply and help manage energy assistance applications.

I volunteer weekly as energy counselor at GEDCO CARES community center in Baltimore City. CARES helps clients navigate their OHEP energy assistance application while the state offices are closed, apply for Fuel Fund, if needed, and review third-party supplier issues.

The need for *Silver Energy Savers Program* to be codified in statute is to ensure that Maryland will consistency in the future help seniors apply for their energy assistance applications with two functions that always go together:

1. Pick up the phone,
2. With the intent to help the inbound caller answer questions, and help them apply for energy assistance.

Please find Ms. Brown, a recent CARES client's quote, pulled from her letter. The original hand-written letter is included and it's typed up so that you can read it.

What special service did CARES provide that Ms. Brown mentions after she had flamed out applying online?

We picked up the phone with the intention of helping the caller.

I listened and assured her she would not be “tefloned” to another agency or place. She’d been chasing her tail for 2 weeks and was pretty upset because she had an impending BGE turn-off date. Thank heavens she had called BGE and received a 7-day extension.

“To whom it may concern: Hello, my name is Donna Brown. I’m writing this letter on behalf of people such as myself finding I’d really difficult for me to go online and fill out application to get help with my BGE assistance...”

I want you all to know how much it really meant to me to know that someone took the time and listened to my needs because them last 2 weeks have been nothing but hell for me not knowing if my BGE will be turned off.”

What’s driving this stress? Maryland’s heavy reliance on the internet for benefit education, information, customer service, resolutions and applications. While it may help certain targets, benefits for senior constituents cannot be 100% addressed online. What ends up happening is that issues magnify and then move into the crisis stage. Like an impending BGE turn-off notice. Then folks start dialing and looking for anyone that picks up a phone. Often they call wrong place, and just get another list of numbers and places to visit.

SB905, the Silver Energy Savers Program inbound call service, ensures Maryland’s low-income seniors can safely apply over-the-phone for OHEP energy assistance to keep their heat and lights on.

Below are typed up notes, slightly edited, from Ms. Donna Brown's hand-written letter regarding her phone experience at GEDCO CARES.

Ms. Brown called into GEDCO CARES on February 1, 2022. Ms. Brown was so upset, that the lady who answered the call wasn't sure what type of help Ms. Brown needed, but Ms. Brown mentioned "BGE."

As part of their community services, CARES volunteer energy counselors offer in-person and telephonic help Monday through Friday. Laurel Peltier was the energy counselor volunteer that day.

February 7, 2022
(postmark on envelope)

To whom it may concern:

Hello, my name is Donna Brown. I'm writing this letter on behalf of people such as myself finding I'd really difficult for me to go online and fill out application to get help with my BGE assistance.

So I went on foot to several churches to get help with my BGE [bill]. I was not allowed in the building due to COVID-19 restrictions so I was handed a pamphlet with instructions to again go online and several numbers to call for help. Then I called one of the numbers at a place called CARES. I was transferred to a lady named Ms. Laurel. So I explain to her what my needs were, I shared with her that I needed help filinglling out my energy assistance.

So she asked had I already filled out an application. I told her "yes," but I don't know who to send it to, or if I even filled it out correctly.

So Ms. Laurel said to me, "Don't worry, I can help you to make sure it's done correctly.

When I say this was a sign of relief to know that there's someone out here to help people like myself not knowing what to do over the phone, step-by-step, it was a weight lifted off my shoulders.

Not to mention it had taken me 2 weeks seeking information on how to get help, Ms. Laurel was an angel sent not only did she help me complete my application over the phone, she gave me a follow-up call the next day to reassure me that all my information was sent to the right people.

I truly pray for more people like Ms. Laurel in the world that really CARE about people and I can tell she loves what she does when it comes to helping people.

I want you all to know how much it really meant to me to know that someone took the time and listened to my needs because them last 2 weeks have been nothing but hell for me not knowing if my BGE will be turned off.

*So with that being said I really appreciate her service that she provided me. Thanks.
(Then she wrote something to Laurel, didn't type it up)*

Yours truly,
Ms Donna Brown
8 Tadmore Ct Apt 104
Parkville, MD 21234

2/17/22

Pages 1 of 3

To whom it may concern

Hello my name is Donna Brown I'm writing this letter on the behalf of people such as myself finding it's really difficult for me to go online and fill out application to get help with my BGE assistance so I went on foot to several churches to get help with my BGE I was not allowed in the building do to Covid 19 restrictions so I was handed a pamphlet with instruction to again go online and several numbers to call for help then I call one of the numbers a place call CARE I was transfer to a lady name Ms. Laurel. So I explain to her what my needs where I share with her that I needed help

over →

feeling out my Energy as a strange
 so she ask if I feel out my
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 I don't know who to send
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Yang Jia

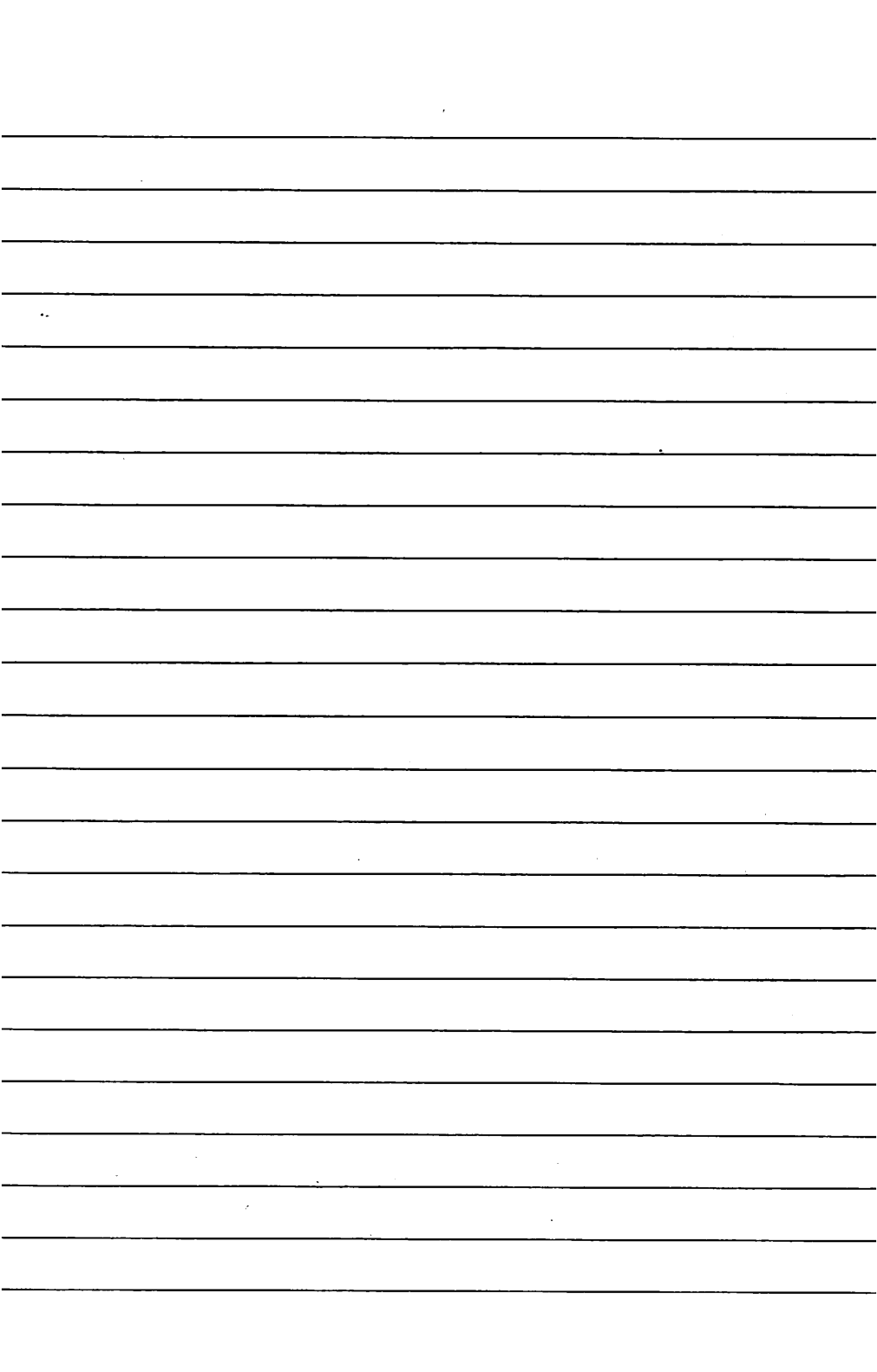
feeling out my Energy as strange
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/correct. When I say this was
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Danny called DGE - got extension
OHP

Page 3 of 3

I truly pray for more people like Mrs. Laurel in the world that really CARES about people and I can tell she Loves what she does when it comes to helping people. I want you all, know how much it really meant to me to know someone took out time and listen to my needs because them last 2 weeks been nothing but hell for me not knowing if my B&E will be turn off so with that being said I really appreciate per service that she provided me Thanks
Mrs. Laurel, you ROCK!! 😊
Have A Blessd DAY

Yours truly
Ms. Jenna Brown
cell: 443-529-2901



SB 905 testimony_2022.2.28 UWCM.pdf

Uploaded by: Quinton Askew

Position: FAV

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211 Maryland United Way Helpline

Written Testimony in Support of SB 905

Home Energy Assistance – Silver Energy Savings Program

Senate Finance Committee

March 1, 2022

Thank you, Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Franklyn Baker. I am the President and CEO of United Way of Central Maryland that houses the 211 Maryland United Way Helpline that serves central Maryland.

211 Maryland United Way Helpline strongly supports SB 905, which allows the Silver Energy Savings program to reduce barriers for seniors 60 years and older. This bill will expand the reach for those seeking assistance for home energy programs.

211 is a number people can call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days in the year, in over 150 languages, and speak to a live person when facing a crisis and need help. There are four 211 call centers in Maryland. The largest call center is operated by United Way and serves the central Maryland region, including Baltimore City and Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Harford, and Howard Counties. Last year we received over 146,463 calls from Maryland residents in need. Due to the pandemic, our callers requesting medically related assistance such as COVID test sites and public health information increased 95%. The governor dedicated 211 as the number to call statewide on COVID-19 resources and the governor's declarations. With that, we saw the most significant increase in need surrounding medical, food, housing, and utilities for Marylanders.

SB 905 will allow 211 Maryland United Way Helpline to expand their role when speaking to callers dealing with a crisis. 211 Maryland United Way Helpline will not only help close the gap of those in need over the phone but connect them to other resources that your constituents faced, such as food and housing stabilization that has increased due to COVID-19.

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Baltimore, MD 21230
tel 410.547.8000
fax 410.547.8289
www.uwcm.org



All of our staff at 211 have a background in social work or counseling. We are certified by the Alliance for Information and Referral Services (AIRS), which is the highest certification available for information and referral providers in the human services industry. We also have staff that have been certified through AIRS as Community Resource Specialist – Aging and Disability (CRS-A/D) specialists. We are primed to take on the role of default navigator for eligible seniors 60 years and older.

On behalf of 211 Maryland United Way Helpline serving central Maryland, I strongly encourage the committee to issue a favorable report on SB 905. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Franklyn Baker".

Franklyn Baker
President and CEO
United Way of Central Maryland

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Uploaded by: ROBIN LINDENBERGER

Position: FAV

Edward J. Lee, M.D.
Tejaswi R. Sastry, M.D.
Mohit Narang, M.D.
Andrew S. Mener, M.D.
Yousuf A. Gaffar, M.D.
Adam Schuckler, PA-C,MMSc
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Finance Committee

SB905

Support Bill

Maryland Oncology Hematology
Robin Lindenberger Patient Advocate

Good Afternoon Finance Committee,

My name is Robin Lindenberger, Patient Advocate at Maryland Oncology Hematology and I here today in favor of SB 905.

The Office of Home Energy Programs has been instrumental in providing much needed help during this unfortunate time in their lives. For our senior (60+) patients applying for the first time for energy assistance can be a daunting task. Many of our patients are on chemotherapy as well as radiation treatments. They suffer debilitating side effects and is quite hard for them just to carry out activities of daily living. They can not travel to OHEP offices and is difficult to reach a live person on the telephone. It is equally as hard for them to access computers and printers.

I think a dedicated team just for our senior patients to help navigate the application process and obtain all documentation would be a great service. It would expedite the process so they can just focus on getting well. I believe they would have a faster turn around time being approved for the program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robin Lindenberger". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Robin Lindenberger

NASW SB 905 Senate Side.pdf

Uploaded by: Scott Tiffin

Position: FAV



Testimony Before the Senate Finance Committee

Support -- Senate Bill 905 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 Senate Bill 905 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 SB 905.

Respectfully,

Mary Beth DeMartino, LCSW

Executive Director, NASW-MD

Human Services – Office of Home Energy Programs –

Uploaded by: Senator Joanne C. Benson

Position: FAV

JOANNE C. BENSON
Legislative District 24
Prince George's County

Finance Committee

Joint Committees

Children, Youth, and Families

Ending Homelessness

Fair Practices and State Personnel Oversight

Management of Public Funds

Protocol



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony of Senator Joanne C. Benson

SB 905: Human Services - Silver Energy Savers Program and Energy Assistance Fund

Good afternoon Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to present Senate Bill 905. This bill addresses access to energy assistance grants for seniors. For the purposes of this bill and the proposed program, a senior is anyone 60 years of age and above.

Grants available to pay for the utility bills of qualifying seniors have significant positive impact on their health, welfare and housing security. Currently, 41% of Marylanders eligible for energy assistance grants are 60 yrs. old and above, yet only a little more than a third of seniors that apply actually have access to the funds because of incomplete applications.

The application process is cumbersome and has too many obstacles to successful completion and submission. Some of the biggest hurdles are the requirement of individuals to physically go to an OHEP office and to provide backup documents that the individual may not have on hand. This bill provides customer service call centers to help seniors navigate the paperwork and the process for submitting an application to Office of Home Energy Program (OHEP) system.

2-1-1 will provide four Designated Centers in Maryland: Southern Maryland, Eastern Shore, Central Maryland, and Western Maryland. This service will assist seniors with the entire process. Among other things, the call center will work with the local OHEP offices, they will work with the applicant to help them understand and answer application questions correctly, help them obtain missing documents, and provide for a telephonic signature, which is

necessary in cases where the individual can't get transportation to an OHEP office.

In summary, this bill ensures that anyone over 60 that is eligible is able to access the funds available to them to assist with paying their bills and keeping them from making a decision between utilities and other essentials such as food and medication.

For this reason, I request a favorable report for SB 905.

SB905 Silver Energy Savers Program – Energy Assist

Uploaded by: Tammy Bresnahan

Position: FAV



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facebook.com/aarpm

SB 905 Silver Energy Savers Program – Energy Assistance Fund
FAVORABLE
Senate Finance Committee
March 1, 2022

Good afternoon, Chair Kelley, and members of the Senate Finance Committee. I am Tammy Bresnahan, Director Advocacy for AARP MD. AARP MD and its over 850,000 members support SB 905 Silver Energy Savers Human Services. We thank Senator Benson for sponsoring this important legislation.

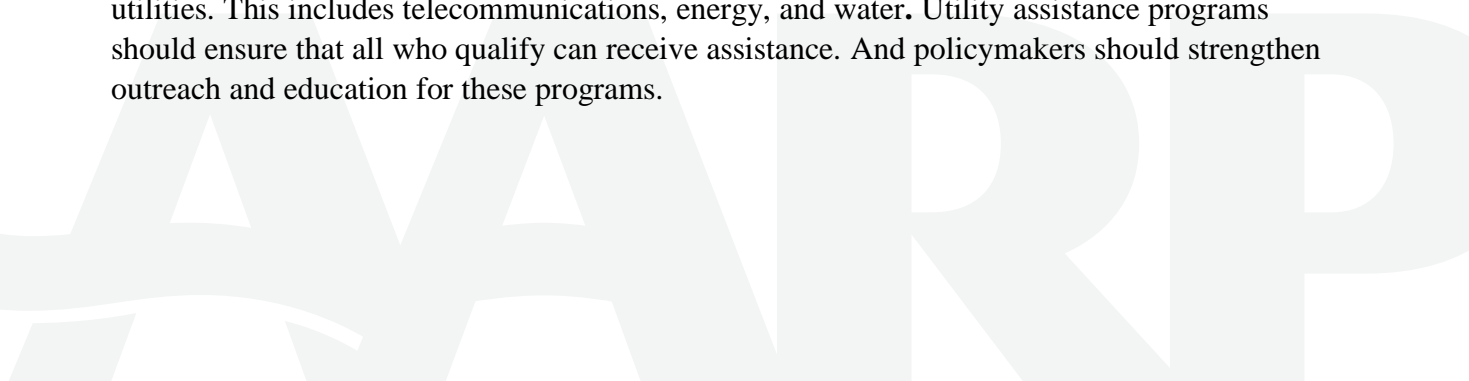
SB 905 establishes a Silver Energy Savers Program in the Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP) in the Department of Human Services (DHS) to provide bill assistance to eligible energy customers who are at least 60 years old. OHEP must designate four regional centers to administer the program and approve a third-party supplier to provide assistance through the program. The bill also establishes the OHEP Energy Assistance Fund, administered by DHS, to be used for administrative costs of the program, including staffing.

In Maryland, 41% of the 400,000 low-income households are older adults 60 and older. Since the pandemic, residential prices for natural gas, electricity, and fuel oil have increased significantly. According to the Applied Public Policy Research Report “APPRISE”, low-income older households spend an average of 13 percent of their income on residential energy. In 2021, OHEP overall denial rates, the portion of families that applied for OHEP grants were denied, was 45% per OHEP reporting to the Public Service Commission.

Home energy costs are a major expense for U.S. households. Price increases have a greater impact on older consumers and households with lower incomes. Too often, older adults with low incomes must choose between cutting back on energy expenditures and reducing spending for other necessities. They may end up risking their health or comfort.

When home energy prices are high or unpredictable, older adults may be unable to adequately cool and heat their homes. Such exposure can lead to a host of adverse health outcomes. These can range from the aggravation of chronic health conditions to food spoilage and even premature death.

Regulators and lawmakers should ensure that consumers with low incomes can afford their utilities. This includes telecommunications, energy, and water. Utility assistance programs should ensure that all who qualify can receive assistance. And policymakers should strengthen outreach and education for these programs.



SB 905 will:

- Help more low-income seniors keep their heat and lights on by ensuring that seniors 60 and older send in complete applications, resulting in more energy assistance grants.
- Address the technology and digital divide by offering an inbound telephonic service that will answer the phone and offer help and support.
- Ensures consistent energy assistance information and service for seniors living in any Maryland ZIP code.
- Offer seniors extra support to handle a tricky application that has high denial rates. We presume they're even higher for seniors, though that data isn't public.
- Provide essential follow-up connection if documents are missing and the application is in on track for denial.

For these reasons, AARP MD respectfully request the Committee issue a Favorable report on SB 905. For questions or follow up, please contact Tammy Bresnahan at tbresnahan@aarps.org or at 410-302-8451.

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Position: INFO

DATE: March 1, 2022

BILL NUMBER: SB 905

COMMITTEE: Finance

BILL TITLE: Human Services – Silver Energy Savers Program and Energy Assistance Fund

DHS POSITION: Letter of Information

The Department of Human Services (the Department) respectfully submits this letter of information regarding Senate Bill 905 (SB 905). SB 905 requires the Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP) within the Family Investment Administration (FIA) to establish a Silver Energy Savers Program to provide assistance to eligible energy customers who are at least 60 years old.

Currently, OHEP allocates \$250,000 to its Local Administering Agencies (LAA), including Community Action Agencies, to fund outreach activities. Each LAA is required to submit an annual outreach plan, which is approved by OHEP in the state of Maryland. A key federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) outreach requirement is targeted outreach to individuals aged 60 years or older– with a goal of increasing applications for those 60 years or older by at least 5% each year. As part of the annual outreach planning process, each LAA carefully considers the unique needs of its community, especially seniors, one of Maryland’s most vulnerable populations. The partnership has created relationships with Departments of Aging, senior living communities and senior community centers throughout the state. Additionally, DHS maintains a state-wide call center to field constituents’ application questions with several local offices staffing their own call centers where applicants may apply over the phone.

The bill includes a funding mechanism allocated to establish the “Energy Assistance Fund”, which would provide funding for the 4 outreach centers throughout the state. Currently, OHEP’s operating budget allocates over \$10 million annually to Local Administering offices to fund administrative costs associated with assisting customers with completing an energy assistance application, as well as the administrative costs for determining eligibility for the program. The bill requires 6 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) positions in each of the 4 centers throughout the state. The Department estimates the net fiscal impact will be approximately \$1.30 million in FY 2023, and \$1.35 million annually thereafter.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to share the aforementioned information regarding SB 905 for the Committee’s consideration.

