

**BILL NUMBER:** House Bill 945**COMMITTEE:** Economic Matters**BILL TITLE:** Human Services - Critical Medical Needs Program - Application for Assistance**DHS POSITION:** Letter of Information

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The Department of Human Services (Department) respectfully offers this letter of information regarding House Bill 945 (HB 945). HB 945 requires the Department to waive certain application criteria for the Critical Medical Needs Program (CMN) for individuals over the age of 60. Specifically, CMN applicants over the age of 60 would not be required to provide certification of a severe health condition from a medical provider.

The Critical Medical Needs Pilot Program was a voluntary partnership between the Department's Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP), the Office of the People's Counsel, the Department of Housing and Community Development, the advocate community, and utility providers. This pilot was formally enshrined in law within OHEP with the passage of the Critical Medical Needs Program Act of 2019 (Chapters 282 and 283). Since then, OHEP continues to build out the infrastructure needed for a robust and successful CMN program.. These efforts include establishing formal processes, updating the OHEP Data Management System, and training navigators.

With the expansion of CMN outlined in HB 945, OHEP) will see an increase in the number of applications submitted. As a result of the increased number of CMN applications, OHEP will require additional dedicated CMN staff. The Department expects a fiscal impact of \$73,349 in FY22, and an estimated average of \$85,118 each year thereafter for staffing and salaries.

One of the most important benefits of the CMN program is the ability of OHEP staff to request a 30-day medical hold from the utility on the applicant's behalf. Currently all CMN applicants are automatically eligible for a 30-day emergency hold. OHEP utilizes the Physician's Certification form provided by the Maryland Public Service Commission (PSC) to apply for a medical hold for the applicant. With the Physician's Certification form on-file, OHEP can quickly apply the emergency 30-day hold to an account, and prevent loss of service immediately. However, if OHEP is unable to collect the Physician's Certification form from CMN applicants over the age of 60, then the emergency 30-day medical account hold would be unavailable to this population.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to share the aforementioned information regarding HB 945 and respectfully requests that this information be considered during the Committee's deliberations.