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BILL NO.: **House Bill 945**
 Human Services
 Critical Medical Needs Program
 Application for Assistance

COMMITTEE: **Economic Matters**

HEARING DATE: **February 11, 2021**

SPONSOR: **Delegate Carey**

POSITION: **Informational**

The Office of People’s Counsel partners with the Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP) in its administration of the Critical Medical Needs Program. The Critical Medical Needs Program reduces barriers to home energy assistance applications for critically medically vulnerable individuals. The Program’s key feature is to expedite OHEP applications for those who meet the statutory and regulatory definitions of a critically medically vulnerable individual and follow the OHEP process requiring confirmation by the individual’s healthcare provider. A normal OHEP application for assistance is processed within 45 days; the Critical Medical Needs Program fast tracks the processing times for the most vulnerable individuals. House Bill 945 seeks to expand eligibility of the Critical Medical Needs Program to include individuals over age 60 who self-certify as critically medically vulnerable – without confirmation from a healthcare provider – and use a navigator’s assistance to process their application.

House Bill 945 seeks to address the important goal of serving the energy assistance needs of individuals over age 60. The bill has potential unintended consequences, however. First, it enables individuals over age 60 who may not be medically compromised to access the fast-track application process; individuals age 60 would not need to provide

any information from a healthcare provider to be served under the Program. In turn, increased numbers of participating individuals could slow down the expedited application process for those who are certified by a healthcare provider to be medically vulnerable individuals.

Second, the new eligibility group created under the bill will increase OHEP's work to process a new – and likely a large – group of customers. Such an expansion of OHEP's responsibilities necessitates increased funding and added staff to meet the demand. Without more resources to handle the additional applications, the Program's goal of reducing application processing times would be undermined.