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**THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES**  
**ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401**

**HB 945 - Human Services - Critical Medical Needs Program - Application for Assistance**

**SPONSOR TESTIMONY**

Cross-file: **SB 907**

House Economic Matters Committee, February 11, 2021

Chairman Davis, Vice Chair Dumais and Members of the Committee,

**House Bill 945** is a simple bill that seeks a common-sense approach to removing what is often the single obstacle for qualifying individuals to receive assistance through the Critical Medical Needs Program (CMNP). This bill is especially timely because of the pandemic.

In 2019 the Committee supported my legislation that was passed and enacted, to establish the Critical Medical Needs Program, run by OHEP, and I am grateful. It formalized a program that had been a successful pilot designed to ensure individuals with critical medical needs would get the necessary assistance and access to available funds to keep their electricity on. The program has performed well and has meant the difference in some cases between life and death.

The key to the program is the navigator (of which there are currently 350) completing the application for individuals.

Most of the information they need to complete the application are either items they have in the home, such as electric bills, or something the applicant knows, like their social security number. The one item that must be coordinated with a third party is the physician's certification, which must be signed by the physician.

With this bill, I am asking that the physician's certification be waived for qualifying individuals 60 years of age or older. In normal times, a physical signature from the doctor needs to be coordinated with a visit, which is often untimely. Currently the other option is for the applicant to print the certificate (many don't have a printer), mail to their doctor; wait for the doctor to receive it, sign it and mail it back. This is another lengthy process, and with the current state of the USPS that could take up to 8 weeks or more.

In today's pandemic environment, the situation is exacerbated. Many doctors are not providing non-emergent in-person visits. Even if they are, the critically ill over 60 are extremely high-risk individuals, and it is not advisable for them to venture out for a non-emergent situation.

We are not opening the floodgates for a whole new sizable population. These are individuals that qualify for CMNP from a health perspective. They are receiving assistance from a navigator and have already jumped through all of the application hurdles but for this one.

I don't want to see the electricity shut off at the home of a critically ill senior citizen because of a bureaucratic step that is easily removed.

For this reason, I respectfully urge your favorable support of **HB 945**.