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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.