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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 719: Human Services – Office of Home Energy Programs – Uniform
Redetermination Process

Good afternoon Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to present Senate Bill 719. Like SB 905, this bill is to help seniors that are able to take advantage grants offered to Marylanders through the Office of Home Energy Program (OHEP), but have difficulties with mobility or working through the process.

The purpose of this bill is to make it easier for households with a 65 year old and older resident to stay enrolled in energy assistance programs by streamlining the eligibility redetermination process.

The process this bill proposes is currently outlined in the Office of Home Energy Program (OHEP) 2021 Operations Manual. We want to codify this into law to ensure all of the local OHEP offices around the state are following the process. Currently, a person enrolled in energy assistance program would need to know they had to apply for redetermination annually. Often the year goes by and their eligibility ends because they didn't request, complete and submit a redetermination letter. If they do, and they remain eligible, then after three years that individual must start the application process over again.

This bill does two things:

- 1) It would ensure all enrollees would receive a uniform redetermination letter in the mail that provides them with the ability to answer questions regarding any change to their status that would impact their eligibility.
- 2) It would remove the requirement to reapply after three years. No new application would be necessary as long as the customer indicates that there are no changes to the information that determines their eligibility

I was surprised by the Fiscal Note for this bill. While I acknowledge some initial budgetary outlay for standardizing the letter, mailing it out and providing postage-free return envelopes, it is hard to imagine the need for 23 additional full-time positions to facilitate this process. Ultimately, this bill will actually save OHEP work and money by reducing the number of reapplications. Given the funds allocated to them for the staffing of previous programs such as Critical Medical Needs and other programs, I may feel it necessary to request an audit of OHEP's operations.

Because this bill creates relief and access to a currently obscure and cumbersome process, I believe it is the right thing to do, and I do not believe it requires the funds as stated in the Fiscal Note.

Because of this, I urge a favorable consideration of House Bill 719.