

SB719

FAVORABLE TESTIMONY

SENATE FINANCE SPONSOR: Benson
SENATE HEARING: MARCH 1, 2022

FROM: L. PELTIER

SILVER LIGHTS ENERGY SAVERS - OHEP RE-DETERMINATION FOR 65+

Under the *Silver Energy Savers Program*, this important bill would codify in to law Department of Human Services Office of Home Energy Programs application redetermination process that's a mandate today, yet not a law.

OHEP eligible low-income person age 65 and older would be automatically redetermined for energy assistance grants with much simpler and cost-effective mail-in process. Today redetermination is not constantly done by all local offices.

Today, every senior 65+, even ages 86, home bound, sick, frail or unable to drive, is required to re-apply, year in and year out, at a local office with a state employee taking the application.

Based on OHEP's reporting in the PSC 8903 9/9/21 hearing, of the ~145,000 households that applied for OHEP in 2021, 66,000 were denied. A 45% denial rate points to a significant challenge with this process, especially for seniors. Seniors are not technologically savvy. Plus, given their age ,their income levels and household's makeup will rarely change.

SB719 is smart government:

- Reduces the OHEP labor costs since tens of thousands of seniors will not be re-applying every single year.
- Automates and centralizes a post card mail-in process that is leagues more efficient than today's process.
- Offers low-income seniors a way to stay in place and safely get utility bill grants.
- Reduces the denial rates for seniors who must keep their heat and lights on.
- Ensures redetermination, which his supposed to happen today, happens.