

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
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SENATE BILL DRS45204-MGa-70

Short Title: Home Comfort Act.

(Public)

Sponsors: Senators Theodros, Robinson, and Applewhite (Primary Sponsors).

Referred to:

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT APPROPRIATING FUNDS TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, DIVISION OF AGING, TO ESTABLISH A HOME MODIFICATION GRANT PROGRAM AND TO EXPAND STATE-FUNDED SUPPORTIVE SERVICES TO HELP SENIORS SAFELY AGE IN PLACE WITH COMFORT AND DIGNITY.

Whereas, North Carolina's population of senior citizens is growing, necessitating expanded home-based care and State-funded financial assistance to enable them to age in place comfortably at home; and

Whereas, assisting senior citizens with necessary home modifications and in-home support services will promote greater independence and safety, which are linked to a higher quality of life; and

Whereas, Article XI, Section 4 of the North Carolina Constitution establishes the State's duty to provide for the welfare of its most vulnerable citizens; Now, therefore, The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

PART I. TITLE

SECTION 1.1. This act shall be known as "The Home Comfort Act."

PART II. DEFINITIONS

SECTION 2.1. The following definitions apply in this act:

- (1) Department. – The Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Aging.
- (2) Eligible senior. – A resident of North Carolina who is 65 years of age or older with a household income at or below two hundred fifty percent (250%) of the federal poverty level.

PART III. HOME MODIFICATION GRANT PROGRAM

SECTION 3.1.(a) Effective July 1, 2025, there is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department the sum of seven million dollars (\$7,000,000) in recurring funds for each year of the 2025-2027 fiscal biennium to establish and administer a Home Modification Grant Program (Program). The purpose of the Program is to provide State-funded financial assistance to eligible seniors to make essential home modifications to a primary residence to improve accessibility and safety, including, but not limited to, all of the following:

- (1) Installation of wheelchair ramps.
- (2) Bathroom safety improvements, such as grab bars and walk-in showers.
- (3) Widening of doorways for mobility assistance.



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(4) Stairlifts and handrail installations.

SECTION 3.1.(b) The Department shall establish an application process and eligibility criteria for participation in the Program. In addition, the Department shall make the final decision about the amount of financial assistance to award to each eligible senior and the specific essential home modifications approved, subject to all of the following requirements:

(1) Each recipient of financial assistance under the Program shall meet at least all of the following criteria:

a. Is 65 years of age or older.

b. Has a household income at or below two hundred fifty percent (250%) of the federal poverty level.

(2) No single household may receive more than ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) in financial assistance.

(3) In selecting eligible seniors for financial assistance, the Department shall give priority to eligible seniors residing in rural and underserved communities.

(4) Program participants are required to engage contractors who hold a valid North Carolina general contractor's license to perform the essential home modifications funded by the Program, and the Department shall give priority to contractors who are certified aging-in-place specialists or Americans With Disabilities Act-certified contractors.

SECTION 3.1.(c) The Department may use up to five percent (5%) of the funds authorized by this section for each fiscal year for administrative purposes associated with administering the Program.

SECTION 3.2. The Department shall begin accepting applications for the Program on or before January 1, 2026.

PART IV. SUPPORTIVE IN-HOME SERVICES

SECTION 4.1. Effective July 1, 2025, there is appropriated to the Department the sum of forty-two million two hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$42,250,000) in recurring funds for each year of the 2025-2027 fiscal biennium to be allocated and used for all of the following:

(1) To provide increased funding for existing programs that aid eligible seniors with their daily activities, personal care, and household maintenance.

(2) To provide State-funded financial assistance to eligible seniors for home health agency services. As used in this section, a home health agency is an agency certified to receive Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement for providing nursing care, therapy, medical social services, and home health aide services.

(3) To provide grants to Area Agencies on Aging, county departments of social services, and local health departments to implement or expand home care independence services for eligible seniors to help them to remain safely in their home settings.

(4) To establish a Caregiver Assistance Program that provides a monthly stipend of up to five hundred dollars (\$500.00) to a family member who provides in-home care to an eligible senior. The Department shall establish an application process and eligibility criteria for participation in the Caregiver Assistance Program. In addition, the Department shall determine the amount of the monthly stipend for each applicant. In determining the amount of the monthly stipend, the Department shall consider an assessment of care needs performed by a licensed physician. Each recipient of financial assistance under the Caregiver Assistance Program shall meet at least all of the following criteria:

a. Is 65 years of age or older.

- b. Has a household income at or below two hundred fifty percent (250%) of the federal poverty level.

PART V. AGING-IN-PLACE RESOURCES

SECTION 5.1. Effective July 1, 2025, there is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department the sum of seven hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$750,000) in recurring funds for each year of the 2025-2027 fiscal biennium and the sum of one million five hundred thousand dollars (\$1,500,000) in nonrecurring funds for the 2025-2026 fiscal year to be allocated and used as follows:

- (1) One million five hundred thousand dollars (\$1,500,000) in nonrecurring funds for the 2025-2026 fiscal year to develop and implement a statewide hotline and online portal to assist eligible seniors with navigating the programs included in the aging-in-place resource guide developed pursuant to sub-subdivision (2)b. of this section. The Department shall work toward making the hotline and online portal fully operational by December 1, 2026.
- (2) Seven hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$750,000) in recurring funds for each year of the 2025-2027 fiscal biennium to accomplish both of the following:
 - a. To pay for ongoing operational expenses and maintenance associated with the statewide hotline and online portal implemented pursuant to subdivision (1) of this section.
 - b. To develop, update annually, and distribute free of charge to eligible seniors and their families an aging-in-place resource guide that contains information, guidance, and planning support regarding home adaptations, long-term care options, safety assessments, and State-funded programs to assist eligible seniors with aging in place at home, including the Home Modification Grant Program established by Section 3.1 of this act.

PART VI. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

SECTION 6.1. Annually by April 1, beginning April 1, 2027, the Department shall submit a report to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services and the Fiscal Research Division on the use of the funds appropriated by this act during the preceding fiscal year. Except as otherwise provided, each report shall include at least all of the following:

- (1) For the first report due on April 1, 2027, an explanation of the eligibility criteria established by the Department for any newly established programs.
- (2) The total number of grants awarded to Area Agencies on Aging, county departments of social services, and local health departments to implement or expand home care independence services for eligible seniors to help them to remain safely in their home settings; the identity of each grant recipient; and the amount of grant funds awarded to each recipient.
- (3) The total amount of State financial assistance awarded to eligible seniors pursuant to this act, broken down by program.
- (4) The specific home modifications funded for each Home Modification Grant recipient and the costs associated with these modifications.

PART VII. EFFECTIVE DATE

SECTION 7.1. Except as otherwise provided, this act is effective when it becomes law.