HOUSE BILL 998

C5 2lr1961
CF SB 905

By: **Delegate Carey**
Introduced and read first time: February 10, 2022
Assigned to: Economic Matters

A BILL ENTITLED

AN ACT concerning

Human Services – Silver Energy Savers Program and Energy Assistance Fund

FOR the purpose of requiring the Office of Home Energy Programs to establish a Silver Energy Savers Program to provide bill assistance to eligible energy customers who are at least a certain age; requiring the Office to approve a third–party supplier to provide assistance with the Program; requiring the Office to designate four centers in certain regions of the State to administer the Program; requiring the Office to perform certain duties to carry out the Program, including establishing a certain communication system, requiring certain local offices to perform certain functions, and authorizing the third–party supplier to allow telephonic signatures for a certain purpose; establishing the Office of Home Energy Programs Energy Assistance Fund as a special, nonlapsing fund; and generally relating to the Office of Home Energy Programs and bill assistance for eligible energy customers.

BY renumbering
Article – Human Services
Section 5–5A–09
to be Section 5–5A–10
Annotated Code of Maryland
(2019 Replacement Volume and 2021 Supplement)

BY repealing and reenacting, without amendments,
Article – Human Services
Section 5–5A–01(d)
Annotated Code of Maryland
(2019 Replacement Volume and 2021 Supplement)

BY adding to
Article – Human Services
Section 5–5A–09
Annotated Code of Maryland

EXPLANATION: **CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.**
[Brackets**]** indicate matter deleted from existing law.

(2019 Replacement Volume and 2021 Supplement)

SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND, That Section(s) 5–5A–09 of Article – Human Services of the Annotated Code of Maryland be renumbered to be Section(s) 5–5A–10.

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

Article – Human Services

5–5A–01.

(d) "Office" means the Office of Home Energy Programs.

5–5A–09.

(A) THE OFFICE SHALL ESTABLISH A SILVER ENERGY SAVERS PROGRAM TO PROVIDE BILL ASSISTANCE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THIS SECTION TO ELIGIBLE ENERGY CUSTOMERS WHO ARE AT LEAST 60 YEARS OLD.

(B) THE OFFICE SHALL APPROVE A THIRD–PARTY SUPPLIER TO PROVIDE ASSISTANCE THROUGH THE SILVER ENERGY SAVERS PROGRAM BY:

(1) HELPING ELIGIBLE ENERGY CUSTOMERS UNDERSTAND ANY FORMS;

(2) HELPING ELIGIBLE ENERGY CUSTOMERS WITH ANY REQUIRED APPLICATION INFORMATION; AND

(3) TRANSPORTING APPLICATIONS FROM AN ELIGIBLE ENERGY CUSTOMER TO A LOCAL OFFICE THROUGH THE PROCESS ESTABLISHED BY THE THIRD–PARTY SUPPLIER.

(C) THE OFFICE SHALL DESIGNATE FOUR CENTERS TO ADMINISTER THE SILVER ENERGY SAVERS PROGRAM, INCLUDING:

(1) ONE LOCATION IN CENTRAL MARYLAND;

(2) ONE LOCATION ON THE EASTERN SHORE OF MARYLAND;

(3) ONE LOCATION IN SOUTHERN MARYLAND; AND

(4) ONE LOCATION IN WESTERN MARYLAND.

(D) CENTERS DESIGNATED BY THE OFFICE UNDER SUBSECTION (C) OF THIS SECTION SHALL:

(1) ESTABLISH CALL CENTERS TO PROVIDE ASSISTANCE TO ELIGIBLE ENERGY CUSTOMERS;

(2) ASSIST ELIGIBLE ENERGY CUSTOMERS IN GATHERING THE INFORMATION REQUIRED TO SUBMIT AN APPLICATION TO A LOCAL OFFICE;

(3) COLLECT DATA FOR EACH ELIGIBLE ENERGY CUSTOMER THAT IS PROVIDED ASSISTANCE, INCLUDING THE CUSTOMER'S:

(I) NAME;

(II) ADDRESS;

(III) AGE;

(IV) TELEPHONE NUMBER; AND

(V) UTILITY COMPANY; AND

(4) MAINTAIN WRITTEN RECORDS OF THEIR ACTIONS.

(E) THE OFFICE SHALL:

(1) ESTABLISH A COMMUNICATION SYSTEM BETWEEN LOCAL OFFICES AND THE THIRD–PARTY SUPPLIER APPROVED UNDER SUBSECTION (B) OF THIS SECTION TO ENABLE COMMUNICATION ABOUT THE APPLICATIONS OF ELIGIBLE ENERGY CUSTOMERS, THE GRANTS PROCESS, AND THE REASONS FOR DENIAL OF AN APPLICATION;

(2) REQUIRE LOCAL OFFICES TO:

(I) PERFORM HOME VISITS TO OBTAIN DOCUMENTS FROM ELIGIBLE ENERGY CUSTOMERS WHEN NECESSARY; AND

(II) ESTABLISH A SYSTEM TO COORDINATE THE TRANSFER OF DOCUMENTS TO THE THIRD–PARTY SUPPLIER; AND

(3) AUTHORIZE THE THIRD–PARTY SUPPLIER TO ALLOW TELEPHONIC SIGNATURES FOR ELIGIBLE ENERGY CUSTOMERS IN THE SILVER ENERGY SAVERS PROGRAM.

(F) (1) IN THIS SUBSECTION, "FUND" MEANS THE OFFICE OF HOME ENERGY PROGRAMS ENERGY ASSISTANCE FUND.

(2) THERE IS AN OFFICE OF HOME ENERGY PROGRAMS ENERGY ASSISTANCE FUND.

(3) THE PURPOSE OF THE FUND IS TO ADMINISTER THE SILVER ENERGY SAVERS PROGRAM.

(4) THE DEPARTMENT SHALL ADMINISTER THE FUND.

(5) THE FUND IS A SPECIAL, NONLAPSING FUND THAT IS NOT SUBJECT TO § 7–302 OF THE STATE FINANCE AND PROCUREMENT ARTICLE.

(6) THE STATE TREASURER SHALL HOLD THE FUND SEPARATELY, AND THE COMPTROLLER SHALL ACCOUNT FOR THE FUND.

(7) THE FUND CONSISTS OF:

(I) MONEY APPROPRIATED IN THE STATE BUDGET TO THE FUND; AND

(II) ANY OTHER MONEY FROM ANY OTHER SOURCE ACCEPTED FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE FUND.

(8) FOR FISCAL YEAR 2024, THE GOVERNOR SHALL INCLUDE IN THE ANNUAL BUDGET BILL AN APPROPRIATION OF $200,000 TO THE FUND.

(9) THE FUND MAY BE USED ONLY FOR ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS OF THE SILVER ENERGY SAVERS PROGRAM, INCLUDING STAFFING.

(10) (I) THE STATE TREASURER SHALL INVEST THE MONEY OF THE FUND IN THE SAME MANNER AS OTHER STATE MONEY MAY BE INVESTED.

(II) ANY INTEREST EARNINGS OF THE FUND SHALL BE CREDITED TO THE GENERAL FUND OF THE STATE.

(11) EXPENDITURES FROM THE FUND MAY BE MADE ONLY IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE STATE BUDGET.

(12) MONEY EXPENDED FROM THE FUND FOR THE SILVER ENERGY SAVERS PROGRAM IS SUPPLEMENTAL TO AND IS NOT INTENDED TO TAKE THE PLACE OF FUNDING THAT OTHERWISE WOULD BE APPROPRIATED FOR BILL ASSISTANCE TO ELIGIBLE ENERGY CUSTOMERS.

SECTION 3. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect July 1, 2022.