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BILL NO.: House Bill 945
Human Services
Critical Medical Needs Program
Application for Assistance

COMMITTEE: Economic Matters

HEARING DATE: February 11, 2021

SPONSOR: Delegate Carey

POSITION: Informational (2/10/21)

The Office of People’s Counsel partners with the Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP) in its administration of the Critical Medical Needs Program. The Critical Medical Needs Program reduces barriers to home energy assistance applications for critically medically vulnerable individuals. The Program’s key feature is to expedite OHEP applications for those who meet the statutory and regulatory definitions of a critically medically vulnerable individual and follow the OHEP process requiring confirmation by the individual’s healthcare provider. A normal OHEP application for assistance is processed within 45 days; the Critical Medical Needs Program fast tracks the processing times for the most vulnerable individuals. House Bill 945 seeks to expand eligibility of the Critical Medical Needs Program to include individuals over age 60 who self-certify as critically medically vulnerable – without confirmation from a healthcare provider – and use a navigator’s assistance to process their application.

House Bill 945 seeks to address the important goal of serving the energy assistance needs of individuals over age 60. While the bill would enhance access to energy assistance services for qualified individuals, it may have unintended consequences. For example, individuals over age 60 that are not medically compromised could be able to access the

fast-track application process because they do not need to provide information from a healthcare provider to be served under the Program. Without the need for medical documentation, there could be increased numbers of participating individuals that slow down the expedited application process for those who are certified by a healthcare provider to be medically vulnerable individuals. The bill also could increase OHEP's application processing work, necessitating increased resources to meet the demand. OPC would be pleased to work with stakeholders on bill amendments to help meet the HB 945's objectives.