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BRANDI NIELAND
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BILL NO.: House Bill 998
Human Services- Silver Energy Savers
Program and Energy Assistance Fund

COMMITTEE: Economic Matters

HEARING DATE: March 3, 2022

SPONSOR: Delegate Carey

POSITION: Support

The Office of People's Counsel supports House Bill 998.

HB 998 establishes a third-party energy assistance enrollment phone number for seniors 60 years and older that provides one-on-one telephonic help through the Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP) application process. Currently, OHEP encourages people to apply for assistance online or in-person at a local office. For many seniors, these options create barriers to needed benefits. Not all seniors are tech-savvy and may struggle to fill out the online application and upload the required documents. Mobility, health, and transportation issues arise for many seniors, making the trip to their local OHEP office for assistance sometimes impossible. The application and document gathering process can be confusing and difficult without help.

HB 998 would set up a new "front door" for seniors to be able to access energy assistance through OHEP. The senior would work one-on-one with an expert who will help them fill out the application, gather documents, request home visits from OHEP as needed, and troubleshoot any issues with their application throughout the process. This new system would ensure that seniors do not fall through the cracks and are able to apply to benefits they need to keep their home energy bills affordable.

Recommendation: OPC requests a favorable report from the Committee on HB 998.