

VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY -- 2022 SESSION

CHAPTER 313

An Act to amend and reenact § 51.5-135 of the Code of Virginia, relating to aging services; allocation of resources; individuals with the greatest economic need.

[H 917]

Approved April 11, 2022

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That § 51.5-135 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 51.5-135. Powers and duties of Department with respect to aging persons; area agencies on aging.

A. The Department shall provide aging services to improve the quality of life for and meet the needs of older persons in the Commonwealth and shall act as a focal point among state agencies for research, policy analysis, long-range planning, and education on aging issues. ~~In providing aging services, the~~ The Department shall use available resources to provide services to older persons with the greatest economic needs and those with the greatest social needs. ~~In allocating resources to provide aging services, the~~ Department (i) shall prioritize providing services to those with the greatest economic need and (ii) among individuals with comparable levels of economic need, may prioritize providing services to individuals with the greatest social need. The Department shall also serve as the lead agency in coordinating the work of state agencies on meeting the needs of an aging society. The Department's policies and programs shall be designed to enable older persons to be as independent and self-sufficient as possible. The Department shall promote local participation in programs for older persons, evaluate and monitor aging services, and provide information to the general public. In furtherance of this mission, the Department shall have, without limitation, the following duties to:

1. Study the economic, social, and physical condition of the residents in the Commonwealth whose age qualifies them for coverage under the Older Americans Act, 42 U.S.C. § 3001 et seq., or any law amendatory or supplemental thereto, and the employment, medical, educational, recreational, and housing facilities available to them, with the view of determining the needs and problems of such persons;

2. Determine the services and facilities, private and governmental and state and local, provided for and available to older persons and recommend to the appropriate persons such coordination of and changes in such services and facilities as will make them of greater benefit to older persons and more responsive to their needs;

3. Act as the designated state unit on aging for the purposes of carrying out the requirements under P.L. 89-73 or any law amendatory or supplemental thereto, and as the sole agency for administering or supervising the administration of such plans as may be adopted in accordance with the provisions of such laws. The Department may prepare, submit, and carry out state plans and shall be the agency primarily responsible for coordinating state programs and activities related to the purposes of, or undertaken under, such plans or laws;

4. Apply, with the approval of the Governor, for and expend such grants, gifts, or bequests from any source that becomes available in connection with its duties under this section, and may comply with such conditions and requirements as may be imposed in connection therewith;

5. Hold hearings and conduct investigations necessary to pass upon applications for approval of a project under the plans and laws set out in subdivision 3, and shall make reports to the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services as may be required;

6. Designate area agencies on aging pursuant to P.L. 89-73 or any law amendatory or supplemental thereto of the Congress of the United States and to adopt regulations for the composition and operation of such area agencies on aging, each of which shall be designated as the lead agency in each respective area for the No Wrong Door system of aging and disability resource centers;

7. Provide staff support to the Commonwealth Council on Aging;

8. Assist state, local, and nonprofit agencies, including, but not limited to, area agencies on aging, in identifying grant and public-private partnership opportunities for improving services to older Virginians;

9. Provide or contract for the administration of the state long-term care ombudsman program. Such program or contract shall provide a minimum staffing ratio of one ombudsman to every 2,000 long-term care beds, subject to sufficient appropriations by the General Assembly. The Department may also contract with such entities for the administration of elder rights programs as authorized under P.L. 89-73, such as insurance counseling and assistance, and the creation of an elder information/elder rights center;

10. Serve as the focal point for the rights of older persons and their families by establishing, maintaining, and publicizing (i) a toll-free number and (ii) a means of electronic access to provide resource and referral information and other assistance and advice as may be requested; and

11. Develop and maintain a four-year plan for aging services in the Commonwealth, pursuant to § 51.5-136.

B. The governing body of any county, city, or town may appropriate funds for support of area agencies on aging designated pursuant to subdivision A 6.

C. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall assist the Department in effectuating its functions in accordance with its designation as the single state agency as required in subdivision A 3.