**A** **BILL**

TO AMEND THE CODE OF LAWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA, 1976, BY ADDING SECTION 43‑21‑55 SO AS TO REQUIRE THE DEPARTMENT ON AGING TO FUND A PROGRAM TO PROVIDE SUBSIDIES TO SENIOR CITIZENS TO PURCHASE A PERSONAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE SYSTEM.

Whereas, senior citizens experience a higher incidence of falling than do younger adult populations, and falling is a significant cause of serious injury or death in senior citizens; and

Whereas, a personal emergency response system, which allows for users to call for emergency medical assistance if they have fallen and are unable to reach a telephone, is an effective way to promote the independence of senior citizens, while protecting their health and safety in the event of a medical emergency; and

Whereas, the purchase of a personal emergency response system is often not a covered health benefit, and the cost to purchase a system and to pay for monthly service is often cost prohibitive for senior citizens who are living on a fixed income; and

Whereas, the Department on Aging is the designated state agency to implement and administer many programs relating to South Carolina’s aging population and is responsible for promoting and executing programs to meet the present and future needs of aging citizens of the State; and

Whereas, the Department on Aging also is responsible for encouraging and assisting in the development of programs for the aging in the counties and municipalities of this State in consultation with public and voluntary groups at the municipal, county, state, and federal levels; and

Whereas, the Department on Aging is specifically authorized to initiate pilot projects to demonstrate new services for the aging; to cooperate with, encourage, and assist local groups, both public and voluntary, which are concerned with the problems of the aging; and to award grants and contracts to public and private organizations for the purpose of planning, coordinating, administering, developing, and delivering aging programs and services. Now, therefore,

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina:

SECTION 1. Chapter 21, Title 43 of the 1976 Code is amended adding:

“Section 43‑21‑55. (A) The department shall fund a program to provide subsidies to low‑income senior citizens to purchase a personal emergency response system and to pay monthly service fees and charges. The department may establish a sliding scale for available subsidies that is based on a senior citizen’s income. A senior citizen is not eligible to receive a subsidy pursuant to this section if the person is eligible for a personal emergency response system through Medicare, Medicaid, or any other available health insurance coverage, provided the person may be entitled to a subsidy to apply towards any portion of costs not covered by the available insurance coverage. The department may contract with one or more private or public organizations to coordinate and administer the program.

(B) For purposes of this section:

(1) ‘Personal emergency response system’ means a portable wireless radio transmitter and a console that enables a person to contact emergency services if the person falls and is unable to get up or reach a telephone.

(2) ‘Senior citizen’ means a resident of South Carolina who is seventy‑five years or older.”

SECTION 2. This act takes effect upon approval by the Governor.

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