



**House
Legislative
Analysis
Section**

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SENIORS' VOLUNTEER SKILLS BANK

**Senate Bill 836 with House committee
amendments
First Analysis (12-4-90)**

**Sponsor: Senator Connie Binsfeld
Senate Committee: Human Resources and Senior
Citizens
House Committee: Senior Citizens and Retirement**

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Public Acts 247 and 259 of 1986 amended the Older Michiganians Act to establish a volunteer service credit program in which seniors, as well as persons of any age who belonged to a nonprofit tax-exempt organization, could deposit credits earned by performing volunteer support and respite services for other seniors, and from which the senior volunteers could withdraw when in need of services themselves. While Public Act 247 authorized the Office of Services to the Aging (OSA) to set up a program in one or more counties, Public Act 259 required the OSA to establish a computer-based volunteer skills bank to implement the program, permitted the office to establish up to five pilot program sites, and authorized it to provide grants to public or private organizations to establish similar projects. Public Act 259 contained an expiration date of April 1, 1989, which was postponed for one year by Public Act 235 of 1988. It has now been suggested that the sunset provision be repealed, since, according to the OSA, the program has proven to be a popular and cost-effective way to augment state and federal dollars.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would amend the Older Michiganians Act to delete the April 1, 1990 expiration date on provisions that required the Office of Services to the Aging (OSA) to:

- Establish a computer-based volunteer skills bank to implement the act's volunteer service credit program.
- Establish up to five program sites to assess the effectiveness of the volunteer service credit program.
- Provide grants to public and private organizations or groups to establish innovative service credit programs.

The bill would also delete a provision of the act that required the OSA to submit a report on the program's effectiveness to the appropriate Senate and House committee chairpersons. Under the bill, the report would, instead, be made annually and be submitted to committee members.

Senate Bill 836 is tie-barred to House Bill 5416, which would similarly amend the act to eliminate the expiration provision for the older persons' shared housing program.

MCL 400.586d et al.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ACTION:

The House Senior Citizens and Retirement Committee amended the bill to require that it be tie-barred to House Bill 5416, which would amend the Older Michiganians Act to delete the expiration provision for the older persons' shared housing program, since advocates of that program also argue that it has proven its worth.

The House committee also amended a provision requiring the OSA to report to the chairpersons of the appropriate Senate and House committees on the effectiveness of the volunteer skills bank, and instead required that the report be made to the members of these committees.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

According to the Office of Services to the Aging, the bill would have no impact on state funds. (12-3-90)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

The bill would ensure that a successful and highly popular program continued to provide benefits. According to the Office of Services to the Aging (OSA), the volunteer service credit approach has been shown to be effective: programs have been set up in 30 counties, with approximately 2,200 volunteers participating and 40,000 hours of service already logged, and grant amounts varying from \$12,000 to \$20,750 have been distributed. In addition to the benefit of making volunteer services available to senior citizens in need of them, the program enables people to stay in their own homes, rather than resorting to institutionalization, and offers relief to the primary caregiver and other family members. According to the OSA'S December, 1989, report to the legislature, many studies indicate that primary caregivers need support, guidance, and assistance to reduce the physical, emotional, and financial stress that, if not alleviated, can result in the premature institutionalization of the older person. The report also states that recipients of service who have previously refused in-home care are more willing to accept assistance when they realize the volunteer is receiving something in return.

For the volunteers, the program creates an opportunity to feel useful to the community as well as the opportunity to bank credits for themselves, thus providing the positive reinforcement to keep participants actively involved. With the banking of service credits, however, the program needs time for its participant population to evolve into one that will use these credits. In addition, the OSA report indicates that the program is successful in attracting not only older volunteers who want to bank their service credits, but also a group of volunteers who do not customarily become involved in voluntary efforts. OSA statistics reveal that the program is intergenerational, with 45 percent of the volunteers aged 45 and younger. This is especially noteworthy since this group does not bank its service credits, but donates them to an aging member of the community in need of assistance.

POSITIONS:

The Office of Services to the Aging supports the bill. (12-3-90)

The Department of Social Services has no position on the bill.
(11-29-90)