

**REPORT OF THE
DEPARTMENT FOR THE AGING ON
THE STATEWIDE SENIOR DISCOUNT PROGRAM
TO
THE GOVERNOR
AND
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA**



HOUSE DOCUMENT NO. 33

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Introduction

House Joint Resolution No. 87 (Appendix A) of the 1982 General Assembly requested that the Governor establish a voluntary statewide senior citizens discount program, building on the experience of other states that have such a program and involving the private and public sectors to the maximum extent in offering purchasing and payment discounts to senior citizens.

In response to the joint resolution, the Virginia Department for the Aging researched the current status of senior discount programs in Virginia, as well as the efforts of other states. Input was obtained from the Subcommittee on Senior Citizens Discount Programs of the Governor's Advisory Board on Aging. Each member of this subcommittee is over 60 years of age and a participant of his or her local senior citizens discount program. In preparing for the subcommittee workshop, each member visited a discount program in an area other than his or her own, and also studied program materials from other states.

The second group invited to supply information and make recommendations was the staff representatives of the agencies administering senior citizens discount programs throughout Virginia. These people participated in a workshop and developed recommendations for this report.

Background

Experience of Other States

The senior citizens discount programs operated by Washington, D.C., West Virginia, Ohio, North Carolina, Tennessee, Missouri, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Maryland and Delaware were reviewed by Department staff, the Subcommittee on Senior Citizens Discount Programs, and the work group of local staff. Specific program information on three of these states (Ohio, Missouri and Tennessee) is included in Appendix B.

The review showed that all states operate their senior citizens discount program in much the same manner. All programs were started for the purpose of offering senior citizens, who live on a fixed and/or limited income, an opportunity to purchase items or services at a reduced rate. However, any senior citizen, regardless of income, is eligible to participate in the programs.

The senior discount programs operating in Ohio, Missouri and Tennessee provide cards to eligible seniors, and decals to participating merchants. All three states claim that the benefits of the program are the increased sales for participating merchants and increased purchasing power for eligible seniors. These states also share problems in terms of the manpower needed to recruit merchants, the difficulty of verifying seniors' ages, and the difficulty of keeping the participating merchants directory current.

Current Status of Virginia's Programs

Virginias' Area Agencies on Aging have issued approximately 175,000 discount cards to the 60 years and older population in Virginia since 1976. This is approximately 24% of Virginia seniors (1980 U.S. Census).

Until the spring of 1982, senior citizens discount programs were operating throughout the Commonwealth. Since that time, two area agencies on aging have found it necessary to discontinue their programs. They indicate a desire to operate a program again in the future; but, either due to cuts in federal funds or a low priority for the discount program in rural areas, they are not operating one at the present time. Of the 23 programs currently operating, 22 rely on federal funds either in whole or in part. The remaining program receives operating funds from local government and other sources. All programs accept contributions for the program cards issued to the seniors. Contributions range from \$1.00 to \$3.50, with the average contribution being \$2.00.

These locally initiated programs have been tailored to best serve their population and the business community. All of the programs are similar but, their individual differences ideally suit them to their own areas. The programs that have started since 1980 have not developed the degree of local merchant participation achieved by those programs started in the mid '70's.

While all programs issue a card that bears the name and age of the individual and the identity of the issuing agency, some lack information such as: address, social security number, a signature of an official of the issuing agency, and statement of verification of age. This information would give the cards a great deal more credibility within the business community.

The degree to which different programs actively recruit seniors and businesses is reflected in the amount of agency funds devoted to the program. None of the area agencies on aging have assigned a full time staff person to the program. The staff time devoted to the program varies from 10% to 50%.

All agencies have a directory of participating merchants, but there is little consistency in the way agencies handle their directories. At the best, it is updated twice per year, with new merchants being listed in the agencies' newsletters monthly or every other month. At the other end of the scale, the directory has not been updated in almost 2 years. The reason given is that it is very expensive and the budget does not permit more frequent updating.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the Virginia Department for the Aging and the input of the Subcommittee on Senior Citizens Discount Programs and the local staff work group, (Appendix C) the following recommendations are offered:

1. In as much as Virginia currently has senior citizens discount programs operating virtually throughout the state and in consideration of the diligent effort which has gone into establishing these public/private sector ventures, it is recommended that the current programs be actively supported, rather than duplicated or replaced.
2. Area agencies on aging should be encouraged to publicize their senior citizens discount programs to increase the number of elderly receiving and using senior citizens discount cards. Special emphasis should be placed on reaching the low-income elderly.
3. To provide uniformity and visibility to the program a state decal should be developed for use by merchants. Additionally, a standard card format should be developed and used in all localities as new cards are issued.
4. The Department for the Aging, through the area agencies on aging, should recognize the cooperation and support of those merchants participating in senior citizens discount programs statewide. The Department should provide a Commonwealth senior citizens discount program decal that participating merchants may display in their stores. Also, the merchants should receive a letter of appreciation from the Governor. Recruitment of participating businesses should be the responsibility of the local agency administering the program.

Funds permitting, localities should be encouraged to maintain a current directory of participating merchants.

5. The Department for the Aging should provide the necessary technical assistance to aid and encourage all area agencies to participate and continue to participate in the senior citizens discount programs. Specifically, this technical assistance would include guidance in the areas of discount card format, merchant listings, and the contractual material necessary for public/private partnerships. In those instances where an agency other than an area agency on aging administers the senior discount program, the Department should encourage the local area agency on aging to assist in the continuation of such programs.

Implementation of these recommendations will provide the Commonwealth a mechanism to standardize the existing senior citizens discount programs. Furthermore, merchants will be recognized for their participation in these programs. The intent of providing Virginia's elderly with an opportunity to maximize the use of their fixed incomes will have been met.

Appendix A

1982 REGULAR SESSION

LD1642548

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 87

Offered January 29, 1982

Requesting the Governor to establish a voluntary state-wide senior citizen discount program.

Patrons—Plum, Van Landingham, Marshall, Watts, Robinson, Scott, James, Dillard, Murray, Christian, Stieffen, Bagley, R. M., Keating, Sisisky, Munford, Lambert, Davis, Cantrell, Jennings, Campbell, and Glasscock, J. S.

Referred to the Committee on Health, Welfare and Institutions

WHEREAS, the population of the nation is growing older with almost fourteen percent of the citizens of the Commonwealth of Virginia being sixty years of age and over; and

WHEREAS, our citizens should be able to live in dignity and grace, and be as self-supporting as possible, during their senior years; and

WHEREAS, the senior years often bring lower incomes, declining purchasing power and increased medical expenses; and

WHEREAS, the public funds available to assist senior citizens are limited, and the need and opportunities to involve the private sector in responding to this problem are great; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Governor of Virginia be requested to establish a voluntary statewide senior citizen discount program, building on the experiences of other states that have such a program and involving the private and public sectors to the maximum extent in offering purchasing and payment discounts to senior citizens.

The Governor is requested to report the progress in establishing the program to the General Assembly by January 15, 1983.

Official Use By Clerks

Agreed to By
The House of Delegates
without amendment
with amendment
substitute
substitute w/amdt

Agreed to By The Senate
without amendment
with amendment
substitute
substitute w/amdt

Date:

Date:

Clerk of the House of Delegates

Clerk of the Senate

Appendix B

I. OHIO - GOLDEN BUCKEYE DISCOUNT PROGRAM

A. How the Program Began

The program was started in 1976; it was the first such statewide program for senior citizens 65 years and older in the nation. It was started by Governor John A. Rhoades, with the Ohio Commission on Aging and the 12 area agencies on aging. In 1979, Ohio state legislature officially created the program and opened it up to totally and/or permanently disabled persons 18 years of age and older. Along with other things, it is intended to increase the purchasing power of persons on fixed or limited income.

B. How the Program Works

The program is open at no charge to all persons 65 years and older and those 18 years and older who are certified permanently or totally disabled. Once their cards are issued to them, they are entitled to discounts on services and items purchased through participating merchants. The exact amount of the discount is determined by the participating merchant. The participating merchants can be identified by the Golden Buckeye decal displayed in their windows, or through a listing of merchants distributed to the card holders.

C. How the Senior Citizens are Enrolled

Area agencies on aging (12) statewide take applications from eligible residents. The applications are mailed to the Ohio Commission on Aging, who certifies and processes the cards (no photograph), and mails them to the eligible applicants.

D. How the Program is Financed

Funding for the Golden Buckeye program comes from some state funds and an authorized Older Americans Act aging service program, administered by the Ohio Commission on Aging.

E. How Businesses are Recruited

Initial contact is made by a letter from the Governor to all retail businesses within the state. The area agencies on aging have community workers who follow up on the Governor's letter and contact the merchants in their area. The area agencies on aging staff complete the contract form with the merchants and forward the papers to the State Commission on Aging, who completes the process and mails the merchant a Golden Buckeye decal for his window adding his name to the merchants directory for that particular area.

F. Benefits

- 1) Business - Increased sales and advertising in the directory
- 2) Seniors and other members - Will directly benefit by savings in the purchase of services and merchandise
- 3) The card is acknowledged statewide

G. Deterrents

- 1) Length of time and manpower required to follow up on the Governor's letters
- 2) Problem of area agencies on aging verifying age of seniors
- 3) Keeping the directory current

II. MISSOURI - SILVER CITIZENS DISCOUNT PROGRAM

A. How the Program Began

The program was started in 1980 by Governor Christopher "Kit" Bond, out of concern for the burden that inflation had placed on Missouri's senior citizens and as one way of expanding the purchasing power of senior citizens on a fixed or limited income.

B. How the Program Works

The program is open to all state residents age 60 and older. Once seniors have received their "Silver Citizens Discount Card", they are entitled to discounts on merchandise or services purchased. The exact amount of discount is determined by the participating merchants. The merchants who participate can be identified by the "Silver Citizens Discount Decal" in their windows, or from the listing of the area merchants in the directory.

C. How the Senior Citizens are Enrolled

Area agencies on aging (10) statewide take applications from interested local residents. The applications are mailed to the state office where they are processed and then the cards and merchant directories are mailed directly to the eligible senior citizens.

D. How the Program is Financed

Funding for the Silver Citizens Discount Program has been authorized through the Older Americans Act aging services program and is administered by the Division on Aging.

E. How Businesses are Recruited

Initial contact is made by a letter from the Governor, mailed to all businesses within the state. The area agencies on aging have organized community recruiters to follow up on the Governor's letters with a personal visit to each business. The recruiters fill out the applications for the merchants and mail them to the Division on Aging. The Division on Aging processes the application and issues a decal to the merchant and enters their business in the merchants directory for their particular area.

F. Benefits

- 1) Business - Increase in sales from advertising in directory
- 2) Seniors - Will directly benefit by saving on purchases of services and merchandise
- 3) The card is acknowledged statewide

G. Deterrents

- 1) The length of time and the manpower it takes to follow up on the Governor's letters to merchants
- 2) Problem of verifying the age of seniors
- 3) Publication and updating of directory

III. TENNESSEE - TENNE·SENIOR

A. How the Program Began

Tennessee Senior I.D./Discount Program was started by Governor Lamar Alexander in 1979. The purpose and intent of the program was to provide an opportunity for Tennessee's senior citizens, who are on fixed or limited income, to purchase merchandise and services at a reduced cost.

B. How the Program Works

Tennessee resident senior citizens may sign up for a free card at various sign-up spots across the state. The applications are mailed to Tenne·Senior; and, a card and directory are mailed back.

C. How the Senior Citizens are Enrolled

In the beginning, a computer printout of seniors over 65 possessing a driver's license, was obtained from the Division of Motor Vehicles. All seniors on this list were mailed a Tenne·Senior Card. After the initial mail out and for senior citizens who were not involved in the original issuance, there are application forms available throughout Tennessee. All the senior citizen has to do is fill out an application form and mail it to Tenne·Senior. They will issue a card (no photograph) to the individual requesting one.

D. How the Program is Financed

The Tenne·Senior is an independent state agency in the Governor's Office.

E. How Businesses are Recruited

All merchants are mailed a letter inviting them to join Tenne·Senior. All they have to do to join is fill out a statement of intent, listing the discount or special service they will offer and mail it to the Tenne·Senior office. Their name will be put in the county directory and a letter from the Governor, welcoming them to the program, is mailed along with a decal for display in their window.

F. Benefits

- 1) Business - Advertising in the directory - increased sales - creates goodwill
- 2) Seniors - Saving money

G. Deterrents

- 1) No contacts at local level to encourage merchants to participate
- 2) No verification of age
- 3) Keeping the directory current
- 4) No way to verify merchants' participation

Appendix C

Recommendations of Participant Groups

- I. Governor's Advisory Board on Aging Subcommittee on Senior Citizens Discount Program
 - A. Members: Katherine Ross, Chairman
Pearl Fears
Macon Fears
 - B. Recommendations:
 - 1) That there be a state level department/division identifiable to the local agencies to provide guidance and technical assistance, as well as to be the collector and disseminator of information pertinent to the operation of a statewide Senior Citizens Discount Program,
 - 2) That each local agency continue to run their own program and that they be encouraged to expand their operation,
 - 3) That each agency have their own directory of participating merchants in their areas,
 - 4) That a decal reflecting a statewide program be developed for use by participating merchants statewide,
 - 5) That the local agencies continue to use the current discount program card that is recognized in their own area. That standards for uniform information on all cards be developed, including verification of age by the issuing agency,
 - 6) That all agencies recognize the age of 60 as the minimum age of eligibility for participation.
 - 7) That the Governor:
 - a) Designate a week or at least a day as Senior Citizens Discount Week/Day,
 - b) Write a letter of recognition to the agencies who administer the program at the local level,
 - c) Write a letter to merchants in Virginia offering them the opportunity to participate in the statewide Senior Citizens Discount Program,
 - d) Write a letter, to be accompanied by the statewide decal, commending the merchants who agree to participate in the Senior Citizens Discount Program,

- e) Initiate action to design a name and decal for the statewide program.

II. Local Senior Discount Program Workshop

- A. Members: staff representatives of the agencies administering senior citizens discount programs throughout Virginia
- B. Recommendations:
 - 1) That a statewide Senior Citizens Discount Program is desirable and that it would provide the local programs with greater recognition. A statewide program, with standardized criteria, would make the program more credible within the business community. It would also provide for technical assistance, as well as a clearing house for information, and allow for accessibility to other state services that are not available to local programs.
 - 2) That standardized program criteria be developed, with input from local agencies,
 - 3) That the age 60 be established as the minimum age for participation in the program,
 - 4) That a local directory of participating merchants be utilized and that a statewide policy for updating be established,
 - 5) That a decal be designed for use statewide and a time frame be established to phase out the use of current decals,
 - 6) That standard form letters, bearing the Governor's signature, be developed and furnished to the local agencies for use in soliciting new merchants, as well as commending those who choose to participate.
 - 7) That standard conditions be developed, spelling out the expectations of the local agencies and the state agency,
 - 8) That the Department for the Aging designate a local agency as the official administering agency for the local senior citizens discount program,
 - 9) That the Department for the Aging explore the possibility of additional funding for expansion of the local program.

