

Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 202 (Delegate Vogel)
 Health

**Public Health - Social Isolation and Loneliness Pilot Grant Program -
 Establishment**

This bill establishes the Social Isolation and Loneliness Pilot Grant Program in the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) to (1) examine the impact of social isolation and loneliness on vulnerable communities; (2) encourage programming to alleviate the negative health effects caused by social isolation and loneliness; (3) target populations in the State at increased risk for social isolation and loneliness; and (4) inform future policy and programming to reduce social isolation and loneliness. For fiscal 2028, the Governor must include \$100,000 in the operating budget for the program. The bill also establishes requirements for the distribution of grants and reporting requirements related to the program. **The bill takes effect on October 1, 2026, and terminates on March 31, 2030.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: MDH general fund expenditures increase by \$28,700 in FY 2027 for contractual staff. Future years reflect ongoing costs, the bill’s mandated appropriation, and termination of the program in FY 2030. Revenues are not affected. **This bill establishes a mandated appropriation for FY 2028.**

(in dollars)	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	28,700	140,900	42,600	22,200	0
Net Effect	(\$28,700)	(\$140,900)	(\$42,600)	(\$22,200)	\$0

Note: () = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate increase; (-) = indeterminate decrease

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: Potential meaningful.

Analysis

Bill Summary: “Eligible entity” means an entity or organization that serves patients, clients, or programming participants vulnerable to the adverse health effects of social isolation and loneliness, as determined by MDH.

Grant Distribution

The program must award a grant to five eligible entities for the costs associated with maintaining or expanding a program that targets vulnerable populations with socioemotional support to address social isolation and loneliness. The grants may cover operating costs, including those associated with venue fees, personnel, and licensing fees, but may not be used for capital expenditures or research or development programs.

The program must collaborate with the Maryland Department of Aging, the Governor’s Office for Children, and the Department of Housing and Community Development when awarding grants, and must prioritize youth, senior, and rural populations. A grant may not exceed \$20,000.

Reporting Requirements

By December 1, 2029, MDH must conduct an evaluation of the program and report its findings to the Governor and the General Assembly. The report must include (1) an accounting of financial receipts and expenditures; (2) any progress made in the jurisdictions of grant recipients based on outcome metrics produced by the recipients; and (3) the impact of program activities on treating and serving patients, clients, and program participants.

Current Law: The State has established various task forces and commissions to study different facets of mental and behavioral health in Maryland, including the Commission on Behavioral Health Care Treatment and Access, the Behavioral Health Advisory Council, and the Maryland Commission on Health Equity.

Chapter 437 of 2022 created the Howard County and Montgomery County Adult Day Health Care Services Pilot Program and a corresponding task force. The pilot program includes activities and social engagement to assist participants in reducing loneliness and depression.

State Expenditures: MDH advises that one regular full-time and one regular part-time (50%) position would be needed to manage the grant program. Under these assumptions, MDH general fund expenditures would increase by \$141,865 beginning in fiscal 2027. This

estimate includes salaries, fringe benefits, one-time start-up costs, and ongoing operating expenses.

However, the Department of Legislative Services advises that the added responsibilities incurred by this legislation are not permanent and the amount of grant funding under the bill is small and intended for only one year. Therefore, this estimate reflects the cost of hiring one part-time (50%) policy analyst (beginning January 1, 2027) to create the grant application, vet applicants, issue and monitor grant funds, complete the required evaluation of the program, and submit the final report by December 1, 2029. It includes a salary, fringe benefits, one-time start-up costs, and ongoing operating expenses.

	<u>FY 2027</u>	<u>FY 2028</u>
Contractual Position	0.5	-
Salary and Fringe Benefits	\$20,909	\$39,462
Mandated Appropriation for Grants	0	100,000
Other Operating Expenses	<u>7,752</u>	<u>1,403</u>
Total State Expenditures	\$28,661	\$140,865

Future year expenditures reflect a full salary with annual increases and employee turnover as well as annual increases in ongoing operating expenses. The contractual position terminates on December 31, 2029, following submission of the report.

This estimate does not include any health insurance costs that could be incurred for specified contractual employees under the State's implementation of the federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

Small Business Effect: Certain small businesses may qualify for grants under the program.

Additional Comments: In 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General issued an advisory on loneliness as a public health issue, as it can increase the risk of premature death, disease, heart disease, stroke, anxiety, depression, and dementia. The Surgeon General also issued a National Strategy to Advance Social Connection based on six pillars, including mobilizing the health sector, strengthening social infrastructure in local communities, building a culture of connection, and enacting pro-connection public policies.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland Department of Aging; Governor's Office; Maryland Department of Health; Department of Housing and Community Development; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 5, 2026
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