



BILL NO.: Senate Bill 953  
TITLE: Workers' Compensation – Death Benefits - Dependency  
POSITION: **OPPOSE**  
DATE: March 17, 2010  
COMMITTEE: Finance  
CONTACT: Leslie Knapp Jr.

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** Senate Bill 953. The bill would alter the death benefit paid to a surviving dependent of an employee covered by workers' compensation who dies due to an occupational disease or work-related accident.

SB 953 would remove the distinction between a “wholly” and “partially” dependent. It would set a 12-year cap on benefits subject to certain exceptions, provide benefits for dependents who are not spouses or children, raise the allowance for funeral benefits, and expand the definition of a dependent.

County governments are disproportionately affected by benefit changes in workers' compensation laws. Counties are often self-insured and employ high-risk personnel, such as law enforcement officers or firefighters. These individuals already enjoy broad presumptions about compensable diseases assumed to be related to their occupation and generous benefits. While the bill may reduce benefits paid to some dependents, it also would increase benefits for others, resulting in increased costs to local government.

In this difficult economic climate, SB 953 would create yet another financial burden for county governments. Like the State, counties are struggling with budget deficits and the economic downturn. However, unlike the State, which may be bottoming out, counties will remain in decline over the next several years as falling property tax assessments are fully realized. The proposed FY 2011 budget, reflecting some \$400 million in cuts to local governments being carried over from FY 2010, provides \$600 million less in funding to county and municipal government than that of FY 2007, sending local government aid down to 1984 levels. Counties and municipalities have laid off more than 400 employees, used furloughs and salary cuts, and dipped into “rainy day” funds and balances.

If the Committee is inclined to pass SB 953, MACo recommends the inclusion of the attached amendments that are currently being considered in the House to provide reasonable offsets for multiple benefits. However, without the addition of these reasonable changes, MACo recommends that the Committee issue an **UNFAVORABLE** report.