



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

February 18th 2026

SB461

**Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - Heat and Eat Program – Eligibility
Finance Committee
Position: Favorable**

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in support of **Senate Bill 461**. The Maryland Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

Senate Bill 461 alters eligibility requirements for the Heat and Eat Program within the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) by requiring participating households to include at least one elderly or disabled individual. The Heat and Eat Program links energy assistance with SNAP benefits, ensuring that households receiving help with heating costs also qualify for increased nutritional assistance. By refining eligibility to specifically include elderly and disabled individuals, this legislation prioritizes households whose needs are the greatest and whose financial burdens are often the most severe.

This policy provides meaningful benefits across the State of Maryland by reducing food insecurity, lowering the economic strain on vulnerable households, and ensuring that taxpayer resources are directed to those with the most significant needs. Maryland communities benefit when their older adults and individuals with disabilities can maintain stable housing and proper nutrition, two essential components of health and safety. Families caring for aging parents or disabled family members will have greater reassurance that essential needs are met. On the individual level, this legislation protects some of the state's most vulnerable residents, ensuring they do not have to choose between heating their homes and putting food on the table—an impossible decision no Marylander should have to make.

Senate Bill 461 directly reflects the Church's call to care for the poor and marginalized and to prioritize their basic needs above all else. Ensuring that elderly and disabled individuals can safely live, eat, and remain in their homes embodies the principles of solidarity and the preferential option for the poor. This bill affirms our collective responsibility to safeguard the dignity of those too often overlooked and ensures that compassion remains at the heart of public policy.

For these reasons, the Maryland Catholic Conference urges a favorable report on **Senate Bill 461**.