

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2002 Session

FISCAL NOTE
Revised

House Bill 268

(Delegates Branch and Owings)

Environmental Matters

Finance

Public Utilities - Natural Gas Universal Service Program Task Force

This bill creates a 15-member Natural Gas Universal Service Program Task Force to identify low-income gas customers who need help paying their heating bills, identify forms of assistance for these customers, analyze assistance programs in this State and other states, identify assistance funding sources for these customers, develop models for assistance, and recommend options for meeting these customers' energy needs. The task force must report its recommendations to the Public Service Commission, the Governor, and the General Assembly by December 31, 2003. The Public Service Commission will staff the task force.

This bill is effective July 1, 2002 and sunsets June 30, 2004.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Any expense reimbursements for task force members and related staffing costs are assumed to be minimal and absorbable within existing budgeted resources.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: DHR administers the Electric Universal Service Program (EUSP) which provides cash assistance and weatherization services to eligible low-income Maryland

residents. PSC was required by HB 703 of 1999 to establish EUSP. EUSP received \$34 million in special funds in fiscal 2001 and served 65,245 customers.

An EUSP applicant is eligible for assistance if the applicant is an electric customer, lives in Maryland, has total household countable income which does not exceed 150% of the federal poverty level, and is a U.S. citizen, legal immigrant admitted for permanent residence or otherwise legally residing in the United States, or a qualified alien.

The Maryland Energy Assistance Program helps low-income State residents meet heating costs through local administering agencies under the federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Act. In fiscal 2001 the State received \$35.6 million in federal funds and assisted 76,364 customers.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Human Resources, Public Service Commission, Office of People's Counsel, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 27, 2002
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