

SENATE BILL 283

O1, C5

2lr1407
CF HB 138

By: **Senator Washington**

Introduced and read first time: January 19, 2022

Assigned to: Finance

A BILL ENTITLED

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **Department of Human Services – Electric Universal Service Program –**
3 **Eligibility**

4 FOR the purpose of requiring the Department of Human Services to authorize benefits
5 under the electric universal service program for certain electric customers; and
6 generally relating to the electric universal service program.

7 BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,
8 Article – Public Utilities
9 Section 7–512.1(a)
10 Annotated Code of Maryland
11 (2020 Replacement Volume and 2021 Supplement)

12 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,
13 That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

14 **Article – Public Utilities**

15 7–512.1.

16 (a) (1) The Commission shall establish an electric universal service program
17 to assist electric customers with annual incomes:

18 (i) at or below 175% of the federal poverty level; or

19 (ii) for a customer at least 67 years of age, at or below 200% of the
20 federal poverty level.

21 (2) The components of the electric universal service program shall include:

22 (i) bill assistance;

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.



1 (ii) low-income residential weatherization; and

2 (iii) the retirement of arrearages for electric customers who have not
3 received assistance in retiring arrearages under the universal service program within the
4 preceding 5 fiscal years.

5 (3) The Department of Housing and Community Development is
6 responsible for administering the low-income residential weatherization component of the
7 electric universal service program.

8 (4) (i) The Department of Human Services, through the Office of Home
9 Energy Programs, is responsible for administering the bill assistance and the arrearage
10 retirement components of the electric universal service program.

11 (ii) The Department of Human Services may:

12 1. establish minimum and maximum benefits available to an
13 electric customer under the bill assistance and arrearage retirement components; and

14 2. coordinate benefits under the electric universal service
15 program with benefits under the Maryland Energy Assistance Program and other available
16 energy assistance programs.

17 **(III) THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES SHALL**
18 **AUTHORIZE BENEFITS UNDER THE ELECTRIC UNIVERSAL SERVICE PROGRAM FOR**
19 **AN ELECTRIC CUSTOMER WHO DOES NOT MEET THE ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS**
20 **FOR THE FEDERAL LOW INCOME HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.**

21 (5) The Department of Human Services may, with input from a panel or
22 roundtable of interested parties, contract to assist in administering the bill assistance and
23 the arrearage retirement components of the electric universal service program.

24 (6) The Commission has oversight responsibility for the bill assistance and
25 the arrearage retirement components of the electric universal service program and any
26 other funds expended under this section.

27 (7) In a specific case, the electric universal service program may waive the
28 income eligibility limitation under paragraph (1) of this subsection in order to provide
29 assistance to an electric customer who would qualify for a similar waiver under the
30 Maryland Energy Assistance Program established under Title 5, Subtitle 5A of the Human
31 Services Article.

32 (8) (i) If an applicant for bill assistance or arrearage retirement is to be
33 denied due to deficient documentation, the Department of Human Services shall:

34 1. promptly provide notice of the deficiency to the applicant;

1 and

2 2. afford the applicant ample opportunity of not less than 3
3 months to cure the deficiency.

4 (ii) An electric company may not begin the process to terminate
5 service to an applicant while the applicant is curing a deficiency under this paragraph.

6 (9) Notwithstanding paragraph (2)(iii) of this subsection, any assistance
7 received for arrearage retirement by a customer in calendar years 2020 and 2021 may not
8 be counted toward the limitation on the number of times the customer may receive
9 assistance for arrearage retirement.

10 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect
11 October 1, 2022.