

**Department of Legislative Services**  
Maryland General Assembly  
2026 Session

**FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE**  
**Enrolled - Revised**

Senate Bill 461  
Finance

(Senator McCray)

Appropriations

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**Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - Heat and Eat Program - Study**

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This bill requires the Department of Human Services (DHS) to study and make recommendations on the potential number of households excluded from automatic standard utility allowance (SUA) eligibility for the Heat and Eat Program within the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) due to enactment of the federal One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025 (OBBBA). By December 1, 2026, DHS must report its findings and recommendations to the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee and the House Appropriations Committee. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.**

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**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** DHS can complete the required study and report with existing budgeted resources. Revenues are not affected.

**Local Effect:** None.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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**Analysis**

**Bill Summary:** DHS must compile information on the number of households that qualified for automatic SUA eligibility for the Heat and Eat Program in fiscal 2024 and 2025, and the portion of fiscal 2026 prior to enactment of OBBBA, including the (1) average monthly payment to each household; (2) the number of households in each county; (3) the number of households with a member who is at least aged 60; and (4) the number of households with a member who is disabled.

DHS must identify the number of such households that are no longer eligible for automatic SUA under OBBBA, including (1) the number of households in each county; (2) the number of households that qualify for SUA based on verified energy expenses; and (3) the total dollar amount of the benefits households would have received if they had remained eligible.

DHS must identify the number of such households with a member who is at least aged 60 or who has a disability, including (1) the number of households in each county; (2) the number of such households that qualify for SUA based on automatic enrollment or separately based on verified energy expenses; and (3) the dollar amount of the benefits.

DHS must also identify the number of households that experienced a reduction of SNAP benefits because the energy assistance payment may not be counted as income under OBBBA, including (1) the number of households in each county and (2) the dollar amount of reduced benefits.

DHS must (1) evaluate and discuss any other impacts of the reduction of energy assistance benefits on households no longer eligible to receive the nominal benefit under OBBBA, including impacts for new applicants, and (2) evaluate the administrative cost and logistics related to DHS's efforts to provide additional assistance to households with eligibility verification based on energy expenses to individuals no longer eligible for automatic SUA eligibility for the Heat and Eat Program under OBBBA.

### **Current Law:**

#### *Heat and Eat Program*

Chapters 362 and 363 of 2021 established the Heat and Eat Program to expand food access and increase the monthly benefit received for households that are receiving or eligible for SNAP. A household is eligible to participate in the program if they are eligible for SNAP under State and federal law.

In determining program eligibility, DHS must apply a “standard utility allowance” to the shelter deduction used to determine countable gross income for SNAP eligibility. “SUA” means a Maryland Energy Assistance Program (MEAP) payment to a household that is at least \$21 per year.

#### *Federal Changes Regarding the Treatment of Energy Assistance Payments*

OBBBA excludes households without an elderly (60 years or older) or disabled member from automatic SUA eligibility. These households may still qualify for the SUA based on verified energy expenses but must submit verification of their heating and cooling

expenses. Effective November 1, 2025, households with an elderly or disabled member will continue to have the SUA automatically applied.

### *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program*

SNAP is a federally funded benefit that helps low-income households purchase food. Program rules and requirements are issued by the federal government, while administrative costs are split equally between the State and federal government. Participants must meet income and resource requirements. The minimum federal SNAP benefit is \$24 per month. Through December 2025, the average SNAP benefit provided to Maryland households was approximately \$337 per month.

Maryland provides a State supplemental benefit for households with a member who is at least 60 years old to ensure these households receive a total benefit of \$50 per month. In December 2025, there were approximately 30,832 monthly recipients of the State supplemental benefit. An average monthly payment of approximately \$25 was distributed to ensure these households received a total benefit of \$50 per month.

### *Maryland Energy Assistance Program*

The Office of Home Energy Programs within DHS administers MEAP to assist the State's vulnerable populations pay their heating bills, minimize crises, and make heating costs more affordable. Benefits include utility and fossil fuel payments, the Utility Service Protection Program, referrals to weatherization services, emergency heating system repairs/replacement, waivers on utility fees, discounts on fuel purchases, and a gas arrearage component.

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## **Additional Information**

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

**Designated Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Department of Human Services; Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - February 17, 2026  
jg/jc Third Reader - February 27, 2026  
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