

Date: February 16, 2023

Bill number: HB0323

Committee: House Economic Matters Committee

Bill title: **Social Services Programs - Eligibility and Enrollment**

DHS Position: **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENT**

The Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) thanks the Committee for the opportunity to provide written support and recommendation for amendment to House Bill 323 (HB 323).

House Bill 323 would positively streamline eligibility Office of Home Energy Program (OHEP) applications. This legislation would make the application process for all applicants faster, streamlined, and uniform. Second, it seeks to enroll approximately 32,000 additional prospective households for the energy assistance program based on information DHS has learned from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) caseload of households and individuals currently claiming a utility expense.

House Bill 323 addresses the income eligibility requirements for the Electric Universal Service Program (EUSP). The legislation would serve the citizens of Maryland in need of assistance by providing a waiver to customers in the State. It would enhance the client's experience, cut down on processing times and administrative burdens, and extend benefits to people eligible, but not currently receiving OHEP benefits.

On page 2, lines 19 through 22 prescribes that DHS shall enroll in SNAP any individual who meets the financial eligibility for Social Security Income (SSI). This is acceptable for single-individual households. Household composition must be considered in most cases for SNAP eligibility determination. Making determinations based on this criterion could create eligibility and enrollment errors as the household composition would be disregarded when it is a federally required element of determination. It should also be noted that automated eligibility determinations are prohibited by the Food and Nutrition Service. DHS recommends that this portion of House Bill 323 be amended out of the proposed legislation.

Additionally, the Department of Human Services recommends amending the language on page 3, line 18 as follows:

(II) The OFFICE SHALL ENROLL IN ANY FUEL AND UTILITY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM ANY **HOUSEHOLD WITH AN** INDIVIDUAL WHO MEETS THE FINANCIAL ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS ESTABLISHED BY THE DEPARTMENT FOR A RECIPIENT OF:

The Department supports House Bill 323 if amendments are included in the Committee's report as recommended above. The Department is grateful to offer our support and collaboration on HB 323 and requests a favorable with amendments report.

