

HB323 - Social Services Programs - Eligibility and

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Position: FAV

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Temple Isaiah
Zionist Organization of America
Baltimore District

Written Testimony

**House Bill 323 - Social Services Programs - Eligibility and Enrollment
Senate Education, Energy, & the Environment Committee – March 28, 2023**

SUPPORT

Background: House Bill 323 would alter the eligibility requirements for the electric universal service program; require the Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP) to automatically enroll eligible individuals in the available assistance programs; and require the Department of Human Services (DHS) to automatically enroll those who meet certain financial eligibility requirements in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Written Comments: The Baltimore Jewish Council represents The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore and all of its agencies. This includes Jewish Community Services (JCS), which provides social services to low-income Marylanders.

Maryland has one of the highest rates of poverty in the country, with almost 50% of those being considered as living in *deep* poverty. HB323 will provide needed support through the adjustment of eligibility for fuel and/or energy assistance programs to customers with annual incomes at or below 200% of the federal poverty level. With the added requirement of automatic enrollment in eligible programs under OHEP, we will ensure that those who need this assistance will actually receive it.

Additionally, by requiring DHS to automatically enroll those who are eligible for SNAP benefits into the program, the State of Maryland would provide millions of dollars of SNAP benefits to low-income households, increasing food security across the state for vulnerable populations.

For these reasons, the Baltimore Jewish Councils asks for a favorable report on HB323.

The Baltimore Jewish Council, a coalition of central Maryland Jewish organizations and congregations, advocates at all levels of government, on a variety of social welfare, economic and religious concerns, to protect and promote the interests of The Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, its agencies and the Greater Baltimore Jewish community.

HB323 EEE.pdf

Uploaded by: Cindy Carter

Position: FAV



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Education, Energy, and Environment

HB323

Support

March 28, 2023

Cindy Carter
Cancer Support Foundation, Inc

Good afternoon, Chairman and Committee,

I am Cindy Carter Co-Founder of the Critical Medical Needs Program and Executive Director of Cancer Support Foundation. I am speaking in favor of HB323.

For 18 years now I have been working with the state agencies that provide grants for services. We have been working with some of the most vulnerable residents in the state.

Our clients are rarely in need of just one service, but usually require several such as food and energy assistance. However, much of the time they are limited to just "one" try to get the help they need. Between their health issues, lack of support, and the very complicated system, their physical and mental energy and ability to manage another application has been drained. Without finding an advocate to work with them their power goes off. The family is placed in yet another crisis contributing to the domino effect that happens to so many of our at-risk families.

Food and power are necessary each day. Food is immediate and power only becomes an issue when it is about to be terminated. So many of our clients have used their "one" time on getting food. Without the utility grants their power goes out and they are not able to cook or even keep their food safe.



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Each service needed requires a different application and many times a different place to go and set of people to work with to get it accomplished. For example, when a person applies for food stamps the basic information has been obtained that for the most part qualifies my clients for the energy assistance grant. However, now Energy Assistance Grants require a different application and trying to work with yet another agency.

HB323 means that finally after so many years my clients will not have to choose their "one" help opportunity for food or power. Hopefully now they will have both and be able to cook and safely keep the food that they have.

This bill will help to reduce the barriers for so many of the most vulnerable residents in Maryland. This bill will allow those who have already gone through the work and requirements to get food stamps as one of the entry ways into the program, to now be able to get Energy Assistance Grants keeping them safe in their homes.

I am asking for a favorable report on HB323 to provide Categorical Eligibility for Energy Assistance Grants.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cindy Carter".

Cindy Carter
Executive Director
Cancer Support Foundation, Inc.
Co-Founder Critical Medical Needs Program

OPC Testimony HB0323 in the Senate - Favorable.pdf

Uploaded by: David Lapp

Position: FAV

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BRANDI NIELAND
DIRECTOR, CONSUMER
ASSISTANCE UNIT

BILL NO.: House Bill 323 - Social Services Programs - Eligibility and Enrollment

COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and the Environment

HEARING DATE: March 28, 2023

SPONSOR: Delegate Charkoudian

POSITION: Favorable

The Office of People's Counsel strongly supports HB 323. The bill streamlines the process for signing up for safety-net services such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and energy assistance while lessening administrative burdens for State agencies.

Under current law, Marylanders who are eligible for safety-net services must complete and renew annually multiple applications. Those applications are reviewed by different agencies, slowing down an already stressed system. To prove eligibility, the applications ask similar questions and require many of the same documents. This duplication creates an unnecessary burden for households who are struggling to make ends meet, often resulting in our most vulnerable community members losing or not receiving access to important and necessary benefits.

HB 323 simplifies the application process by requiring the Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP) to automatically enroll in any fuel and utility assistance program any household with an individual who meets the financial eligibility requirements established for SNAP, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or means-tested Veterans Affairs benefits.

HB 323 also changes the OHEP income guidelines for the Electric Universal Service Program (EUSP) from 175% of federal poverty level (FPL) to 200% FPL to

match other assistance programs offered by the Department of Human Services. Increasing income guidelines for EUSP creates categorical eligibility for program enrollment so that households who are eligible for SNAP, TANF, SSI, or means-tested veteran benefits are automatically enrolled into energy assistance. By establishing categorical eligibility, one application process allows an individual to enroll in all services.

HB 323 will increase EUSP participation, bringing down energy burdens for low-income households, and it will decrease the administrative costs associated with processing duplicative applications for safety-net programs.

Recommendation: OPC requests a favorable Committee report on HB 323.

HB323-AARP-FAVORABLE-EEE.pdf

Uploaded by: Laurel Peltier

Position: FAV



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**HB 323 Social Services Program and Eligibility and Enrollment
FAVORABLE
Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
March 28, 2023**

Good afternoon, Chair Feldman, and members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee. I am Laurel Peltier, a member of and lead advocate for AARP Maryland. AARP is the largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization representing the interests of Americans aged 50 and older and their families. Key priorities of our organization include helping all Marylanders achieve financial and health security and supporting safety net for seniors and low-income households in the state of Maryland is a priority.

AARP MD and its almost 870,000 members support HB323 Maryland Medical Assistance Program, Maryland Children's Health Program, and Social Services Programs – Eligibility and Enrollment. We thank Delegate Charkoudian for sponsoring this critical piece of legislation.

HB323 is especially needed in improving the energy assistance grant participation for seniors who are income-qualified for SNAP and Office of Home Energy Programs energy assistance (OHEP). Nearly 45% of households eligible for OHEP are seniors.

Today, SNAP and OHEP are two income-eligible benefits that are processed separately by Maryland. Income-eligible seniors usually complete separate OHEP and SNAP applications and often apply at different locations and at different times. This duplicity within our state system has led to many income-eligible seniors not knowing about energy assistance, yet very much needing utility bill assistance.

AARP MD supports streamlining at enrollment safety net programs that help Marylanders safely age in place. We are optimistic with these changes will help more older Marylanders get enrolled in safety net programs at one time, not filling out multiple applications and multiple places.

For these reasons, we respectfully ask the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee for a favorable report. If you have questions or comments, please contact Tammy Bresnahan at tbresnahan@aarp.org or by calling 410-302-8451.



HB323-ENERGY ADVOCATES-FAVORABLE-EEE.pdf

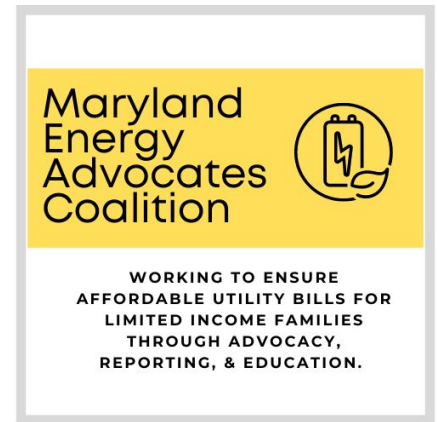
Uploaded by: Laurel Peltier

Position: FAV

TESTIMONY IN **SUPPORT** OF HB323

Social Services Programs - Eligibility and Enrollment

Education, Energy and the Environment
Committee Hearing
March 28, 2023



Chairman Feldman and members of Education, Energy and the Environment Committee: Maryland Energy Advocates is a coalition of non-profits, foundations, churches and volunteers that advocate, directly help, and support policies and change to ensure that the Maryland's low income segment will one day have affordable utility bills that run about 6% of their households' income.

Utility bills are often over-looked. A joke we say is that, "Few care, or are passionate about utility bills, until you are." Then it's usually a crisis with families facing termination notices.

Several of us work directly with Marylanders in home energy utility crisis. Considered low-income by the federal and state government, about 45% are seniors, folks that are disabled, out of work, or work, but don't make enough income to cover their family expenses.

Here's how this HB323 could work in reality if passed and implemented well.

The first example from the field is the solution if this HB323 is passed.

A family, two seniors, and both are younger than 67, is income-eligible for food assistance and utility bill assistance. This couple earns less than \$2,670 in gross income a month, or \$32,040. Their utility bill averages about \$2,000 and with meds and food and rent, they're struggling. In September, they go around their house and gather a bunch of verification papers to prove they indeed are low-income: state ID's, actual social security cards, rental lease and payments for rent, current Social Security benefits letters, Pepco and Washington Gas bills. They drive on a Tuesday to their local Montgomery County Department of Social Security office. They wait for a bit,

and then a State certifier works with them and indeed they are low-income, they need food stamps, now called SNAP, and energy assistance to get monthly bill payment credits. One trip, one application, one intake visit by the state, and one set of documents. This elderly couple has applied for and will receive income-eligible grants to help bolster their family's finances.

This common-sense process is how it's supposed to have worked for years.

Yet here's how it's implemented today. It seems 95% of the folks we help in the field are enrolled in SNAP, but not in energy assistance.

These SNAP-enrolled families are unaware, and not enrolled in, OHEP bill pay assistance. The consequence of not receiving this income-eligible benefit, is that usually around end of February after the heater's been running expensive fuel, they are in crisis with sky-high Pepco and Washington Gas bills. The helper teams in the field, the OHEP offices' staff and the residents are all "in the foxhole" scrambling to get this couple's application through OHEP energy assistance in time to beat the power cut off. If this second, sometimes third state benefit application is done, again, on another day, by the same couple, on time, a 55-day account hold is placed on the utility account so that this energy assistance application can run its long course through OHEP, get approved, get grants credited to account and avoid cut-off.

HB323 is a smart, responsible streamlined bill that makes our state more effective for income-eligible benefits. Energy Advocates thanks Delegate Charkoudian, Secretary Lopez for their sponsorship of this highly important bill.

DHS Letter HB323.pdf

Uploaded by: Lorig Charkoudian

Position: FAV

March 2, 2023

The Honorable C.T. Wilson
 Chair, Economic Matters Committee
 231 Taylor House Office Building
 6 Bladen Street
 Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: House Bill 323 - Social Services Programs - Eligibility and Enrollment

Dear Chairman Wilson:

The Department of Human Services (DHS) would like to provide clarity around our support for House Bill 323. The Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP) has worked with Delegate Charkoudian on this legislation to implement Categorical Eligibility for Energy Assistance. Current projections show that by instituting an average Electric Universal Service Program (EUSP) benefit of \$800 we can provide for the 32,000 newly eligible households ensuring that no eligible household is left behind in receiving this benefit. This includes adequate funding to accommodate the 32,000 newly eligible households in OHEP’s 2024 budget. The DHS budget is able to provide funds for these additional households in future fiscal years. DHS is hopeful that additional information and history of EUSP below will provide the committee with the reassurance and confidence that HB323 is not only reasonable and possible within current budgetary appropriations; it can be done while expanding eligibility to 32,000 households, and is the right thing to do for Maryland’s families, children and adults.

Due to decreasing applications and increasing energy costs, since program year 2021, OHEP has issued supplemental EUSP grants to provide additional assistance to OHEP recipients. Further, partially due to enhanced and supplemental benefits, and a decrease in the number of customers receiving EUSP Bill Payment benefits, the average EUSP Bill Payment benefit has steadily increased in recent years. By eliminating the need to issue supplemental benefits, OHEP anticipates a reduction in average EUSP benefits in SFY 2024. The reduction will allow us to support the anticipated increase in the caseload resulting from HB323 implementation.

Program Year	Average EUSP Benefit
2020	\$504
2021	\$504
2022	\$763
2023 (YTD- January 2023)	\$939

Table 1: Average EUSP Benefit by Program Year



The projections submitted by the Department of Human Services as part of the fiscal impact of HB323 were assembled using a conservative interpretation of the funding outlook. We have provided more detailed projections of the impact of HB323 on OHEP spending in FY2024 and FY2025 (See *Table 2* below). There are several noteworthy considerations regarding the methodology used to generate these projections:

- Assumes that the average benefit amounts will remain consistent with current benefit trends as of 1/31/23. FY23 average benefit amounts have been exceptionally high compared to previous years.
- Assumes that all 32,000 newly eligible OHEP households will receive all four OHEP grants, including both the Electric Arrearage Retirement Assistance benefit and the Natural Gas Arrearage Retirement Assistance benefit. Because the EARA and GARA benefits have additional eligibility criteria and restrictions compared to EUSP and MEAP it is unlikely that all of the estimated 32,000 newly eligible households would receive these benefits each year.

		Electric Universal Service Program	Maryland Energy Assistance Program	Electric Arrearage Retirement Assistance	Gas Arrearage Retirement Assistance
FY 2023	Projected Recipients	81,974	84,065	20,523	7,010
	Projected Budget	\$77,029,148	\$71,887,036	\$22,615,161	\$6,236,476
	Average Benefit Amount	\$939.67	\$855.14	\$1,101.94	\$889.62
FY 2024	Projected Recipients + 32,000 households resulting from categorical eligibility	113,974	116,065	52,523	39,010
	Projected Budget	\$107,098,662	\$99,251,468	\$57,877,112	\$34,704,314
	Average Benefit Amount	\$939.67	\$855.14	\$1,101.94	\$889.62
FY 2025	Projected Recipients + 32,000 households resulting from categorical eligibility	145,974	148,065	84,523	71,010
	Projected Budget	\$137,168,176	\$126,615,901	\$93,139,063	\$63,172,152
	Average Benefit Amount	\$939.67	\$855.14	\$1,101.94	\$889.62

Table 2: FY2024 and FY2025 OHEP Spending Projections



Thank you for giving the Department an opportunity to provide additional information regarding the fiscal impact of House Bill 323. We hope that with this information we can count on your support of the Bill.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or additional concerns.

In service,



Rafael López
Acting Secretary



Senate_Testimony.HB323_Delegate Lorig Charkoudian.

Uploaded by: Lorig Charkoudian

Position: FAV

LORIG CHARKOUDIAN
Legislative District 20
Montgomery County

Economic Matters Committee

Subcommittees

Public Utilities

Chair, Unemployment Insurance



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB 323- SOCIAL SERVICES PROGRAMS- ELIGIBILITY AND ENROLLMENT
TESTIMONY OF DELEGATE LORIG CHARKOUDIAN

MARCH 28, 2023

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

The current process for safety net services in Maryland is administratively burdensome for applicants and inefficient from a state agency perspective. Individuals who are eligible for safety net services currently have to complete multiple applications which are reviewed by different agencies. Most of these applications require identical documents. Many of these applications must also be resubmitted annually in order to prevent loss of coverage. Because of this complicated process, many Marylanders are not utilizing energy assistance programs even though they meet the eligibility requirements.

In 2021, the SNAP caseload in Maryland increased 8% to nearly 573,000 households¹. However, the most current figures report that only 84,079 households are currently receiving utility bill assistance.²

This bill streamlines the application in order to prevent families from missing out on supports due to needless, duplicative paperwork requirements. Specifically, this legislation automatically enrolls an applicant for utility assistance if they qualify for SNAP, TANF, SSI, or means-tested veteran's benefits. This legislation also increases the EUSP eligibility income limit to 200% FPL to match other basic assistance programs offered by the Department of Human Services for low-income families.

Streamlining these services simplifies administration of these programs and improves access.³

Therefore, I respectfully request a favorable report on HB 323.

¹ University of Maryland. Maryland SNAP Households, 2021. [Research Paper].

<https://www.ssw.umaryland.edu/media/ssw/fwrtg/welfare-research/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap/Maryland-SNAP-Households,-2021.pdf?&>

² Public Service Commission of Maryland. Electric Universal Service Program 2020 Annual Report.

<https://www.psc.state.md.us/wp-content/uploads/2020-EUSP-Annual-Report.pdf>

³ Opportunities to Streamline Enrollment Across Public Benefit Programs. *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*. 2 November 2017.

<https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/opportunities-to-streamline-enrollment-across-public-benefit>

MD Catholic Conference_FAV_HB0323.pdf

Uploaded by: MJ Kraska

Position: FAV



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

March 28th, 2023

HB 323

Social Services Programs - Eligibility and Enrollment

Senate Education, Energy, & Environment Committee

Position: Favorable

The 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.

House Bill 323 requires the Department of Human Services to enroll individuals, who meet certain financial eligibility requirements, in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and require the Office of Home Energy Programs to enroll individuals, based on certain eligibility, in certain Office of Home Energy Programs assistance programs; and altering the eligibility requirements for the electric universal service program to provide assistance to customers with annual incomes at or below 200% of the federal poverty level.

The Conference strongly supports the preservation of funding for the social safety net, especially in areas of poverty alleviation, hunger and nutrition, affordable housing, and lifesaving policies to address climate change. As stated in a message by Pope Francis during the Second World Day of the Poor, June 13, 2018: "We are called to honour the poor and to give them precedence, out of the conviction that they are a true presence of Jesus in our midst. 'As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.' (Mt. 25:40)."

The Conference appreciates your consideration and respectfully urges a **favorable** report for House Bill 323.