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**SB26 Maryland Medical Assistance Program, Maryland Children's Health Program, and
Workgroup on Low-Income Utility Assistance
FAVORABLE
Health and Government Operations Committee
March 21, 2023**

Good afternoon, Chairwoman Pena-Melnyk and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee. We are Cindy Carter and Laurel Peltier, members of and lead advocates 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 Maryland would like to bring to the Committee's attention an important section in SB26 --the extension of the current Low-Income Utility Workgroup. This large and effective workgroup was created out of then-ECM Chairman Davis' HB606's pandemic-related emergency utility legislation in 2021. The workgroup is made up of multiple agencies (PSC, OPC, AG, DHS, and OHEP representatives), representatives from the regulated utilities and two citizen advocates. Cindy Carter and Laurel Peltier are the citizen advocates.

In 2022, roughly 70,000 households received "OHEP" grants, the lowest on record since 2010. **Our workgroup's aim to unlock the energy assistance's front door delivery issues and help more low-income families keep their lights and power on. We also have terrific support from OHEP and DHS teams.**

While the workgroup was to begin in July 2021, the first meeting was end of November 2021, with a 3-page report filed a few weeks later in January 2022. While the low-income workgroup got started late, the teams have stayed engaged and have effectively uncovered, strategized, and implemented many commonsense fixes intended to increase OHEP energy assistance grants. The workgroup walked through MDThink application with the programmers and is now working to improve the consumer portal, the teams have re-written a good portion of consumer letters, developed a public reporting framework so that DHS reports the first-ever stats more consistently. We're working well and citizens will benefit from our teams continued work.

We ask this Committee to ensure that low-income energy workgroup as amended is extended so that the HB606 state low-income workgroup can continue to "get stuff done."

For these reasons, we respectfully ask the Health and Government Operations 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.

