

SENATE BILL 461

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6lr2991

By: **Senator McCray**
Introduced and read first time: February 2, 2026
A

Committee Report: Favorable
Senate action: Adopted
Read second time: February 16, 2026

CHAPTER _____

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – Heat and Eat Program –**
3 **Eligibility Study**

4 FOR the purpose of ~~altering the eligibility requirements for the Heat and Eat Program~~
5 ~~within the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in the Department of~~
6 ~~Human Services to require a household to include an elderly or disabled individual~~
requiring the Department of Human Services to study the potential number of households
excluded from automatic standard utility allowance eligibility for the Heat and Eat
Program within the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program due to enactment of a
certain federal law;
7 and generally relating to *a study on eligibility for the Heat and Eat Program within* the
8 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program ~~and the~~
~~Heat and Eat Program.~~

9 ~~BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,~~
10 ~~Article – Human Services~~
11 ~~Section 5 – 506~~
12 ~~Annotated Code of Maryland~~
13 ~~(2019 Replacement Volume and 2025 Supplement)~~

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

16 **~~Article – Human Services~~**

17 ~~5 – 506.~~

18 (a) ~~In this section, “standard utility allowance” means a Maryland Energy~~
19 ~~Assistance Program payment to a household that is at least \$21 per year.~~

2 REPRINT OF SENATE BILL 461 as amended by SB0461/653428/1 04/03/26 at 2:22 PM

1 ~~(b) (1) There is a Heat and Eat Program within the Supplemental Nutrition~~
 2 ~~Assistance Program in the Department.~~

3 ~~(2) The purpose of the Heat and Eat Program is to expand food access to~~
 4 ~~households that are receiving or eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program~~
 5 ~~benefits.~~

6 ~~(c) (1) A household is eligible to participate in the Heat and Eat Program if~~
 7 ~~the household:~~

8 ~~(H) is eligible to receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program~~
 9 ~~benefits under State and federal law; AND~~

10 ~~(H) INCLUDES AN ELDERLY OR DISABLED INDIVIDUAL.~~

11 ~~(2) In determining the eligibility of a household to receive Supplemental~~
 12 ~~Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, the Department shall apply a standard utility~~
 13 ~~allowance to the shelter deduction that is used for the purpose of determining countable~~
 14 ~~gross income for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program eligibility.~~

15 ~~(c) The Department shall adopt regulations:~~

16 ~~(1) to verify household eligibility for participation in the Heat and Eat~~
 17 ~~Program; and~~

18 ~~(2) otherwise necessary to carry out this section.~~

(a) The Department of Human Services shall study and make recommendations on the potential number of households excluded from automatic standard utility allowance eligibility for the Heat and Eat Program within the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program due to enactment of the federal One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025.

(b) In conducting the study described in subsection (a) of this section, the Department shall:

(1) compile information on the number of households that qualified for automatic standard utility allowance eligibility for the Heat and Eat Program in each of fiscal years 2024 and 2025, and for the portion of fiscal year 2026, before enactment of the federal One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025, including:

(i) the average monthly payment to each household;

(ii) the number of households in each county;

(iii) the number of households with a member who is at least 60 years old; and

(iv) the number of households with a member who is disabled;

(2) identify the number of households included under paragraph (1) of this subsection that are no longer eligible for the automatic standard utility allowance for the Heat and Eat Program due to enactment of the federal One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025, including:

(i) the number of households in each county;

(ii) the number of households that qualify for the standard utility allowance based on verified energy expenses; and

(iii) the total dollar amount of the benefits households would have received if they had remained eligible;

(3) identify the number of households included under paragraph (1) of this subsection with a member who is at least 60 years old or who has a disability,

including:

(i) the number of households in each county;

(ii) the number of households that qualify for the standard utility allowance based on automatic enrollment or separately based on verified energy expenses; and

(iii) the dollar amount of the benefits;

(4) identify the number of households included under paragraph (1) of this subsection that experienced a reduction of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits because the energy assistance payment may not be counted as income due to the enactment of the federal One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025, including:

(i) the number of households in each county; and

(ii) the dollar amount of the reduced benefits;

(5) evaluate and discuss any other impacts of the reduction of energy assistance benefits on households that are no longer eligible to receive the nominal benefit due to the enactment of the federal One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025, including impacts for new applicants; and

(6) evaluate the administrative cost and logistics related to the Department's efforts to provide additional assistance to households with eligibility verification based on energy expenses to individuals no longer eligible for automatic standard utility allowance eligibility for the Heat and Eat Program due to enactment of the federal One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025.

(c) On or before December 1, 2026, the Department of Human Services shall submit a report of its findings and recommendations to the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee and the House Appropriations Committee in accordance with § 2-1257 of the State Government Article.

19 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect
20 ~~October~~ July 1, 2026.

Approved:

Governor.

President of the Senate.

Speaker of the House of Delegates.