

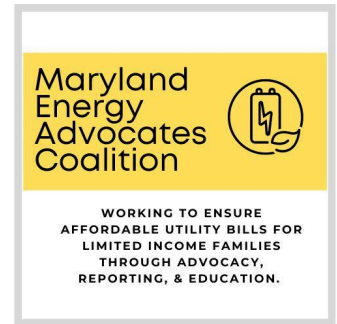
SB 771 Human Services - Energy Assistances Programs Administration and Funding

Education, Energy and Environment Committee

Hearing 3/5/26

Senate President

Favorable



Good afternoon, Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee. My name is Laurel Peltier, and I Chair the Maryland Energy Advocates Coalition. We work to ensure that limited-income families can afford their utility bills.

Our Coalition is in strong support of these proposed changes to the Department of Social Service's Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP) regulations. These changes are based on a 2025 Legislative Services OHEP review report. SB771 would offer income-eligible households more energy assistance by allowing EUSP funds to be used for delivered fuels grants. Unfortunately, in Maryland, we have far too many households that still heat their homes with expensive delivered fuels (oil, propane, wood pellets).

Our Coalition has worked tirelessly to collaborate with DSS to improve energy assistance access for income-eligible accounts. There are 450,000 households (about 25% of utility accounts) that earn less than 200% of the Federal Poverty Level and they are eligible for OHEP energy assistance. The majority profile of this segment is a senior (ages 60+), who learns on average \$1,500 per month in fixed income, and who lives alone in older, drafty and energy inefficient rental. Energy burdens are higher for rural income households because of the higher use of delivered fuels.

We know about energy assistance because we have started a pilot program with DSS OHEP beginning February 2025 which expanded the Critical Medical Needs Program in Baltimore City and County. The pilot is in its second year. The problem we are working to solve is that many medically fragile families have difficulty accessing energy assistance because it's hard for them to get to the local offices. Our pilot is called Utility Advisor Critical Medical Needs, we are now an official OHEP local agency that is 100% telephonic. We have certified 1,100 grants for our most vulnerable families in Maryland since February 2025. It's busy because energy burdens are increasing with these unprecedented utility rates.

SB771 allows SEIF funds to support delivered fuel grants and we thank you for a favorable Committee report

Laurel Peltier

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