

SB0771_DHS_FAV.pdf

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Position: FAV



DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Gloria Brown Burnett, Interim Secretary

March 5, 2026

The Honorable Brian Feldman, Chair
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: TESTIMONY ON SB 771 - HUMAN SERVICES - ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS - ADMINISTRATION AND FUNDING - POSITION: FAVORABLE

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

The Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) thanks the Committee for its consideration and respectfully requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 771 (SB 771).

With offices in every Maryland jurisdiction, DHS provides preventive and supportive services, economic assistance, and meaningful connections to employment and career opportunities to help Marylanders reach their full potential. Through the Family Investment Administration (FIA), DHS administers critical energy assistance through the Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP), which are impacted by SB 771.

Crucially, SB 771 would amend the authorized uses of Maryland's Strategic Energy Investment Fund (SEIF) to include both electricity and fuel assistance. This policy change creates the opportunity for future SEIF-funded fuel assistance for OHEP customers. The current statutory language limits SEIF-funded energy assistance to electric-based programs.

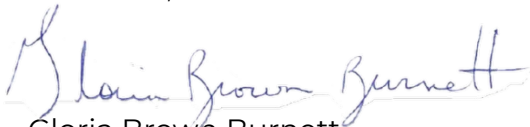
Additionally, SB 771 streamlines Maryland's energy assistance programs by transferring the Electric Universal Service Program (EUSP) authorizing statute from the Public Utilities Article to Human Services Article. The transition is structured to ensure continuity of energy assistance services to Maryland's low-income households. SB 771 declares OHEP as the sole administrator of EUSP. The Public Service Commission (PSC) would retain oversight responsibility of EUSP and would continue to report on EUSP to the Maryland General Assembly.

SB 771 would maintain the current purpose and policies of EUSP. Specifically, EUSP assists households with annual incomes at or below 200% of the federal poverty level through electric bill assistance and arrearage retirement, as well as with residential weatherization services. The bill would clarify the funding mechanisms and interagency collaborations necessary for EUSP's success, including the continued partnership with the Department of Housing and Community Development for the weatherization components.

Finally, SB 771 would preserve the rights, benefits, and retirement status of any PSC employee who DHS and PSC determines would need to move to OHEP due to the changes proposed. However, as OHEP already implements EUSP and the bill does not create new responsibilities for OHEP, DHS does not anticipate there will be a need to transfer any PSC employees.

For these reasons, DHS respectfully urges the Committee to issue a favorable report on SB 771. We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony for the Committee's consideration. If additional information is needed, please contact Justin Hayes, Acting Director of Government Affairs, at justin.hayes1@maryland.gov.

In service,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gloria Brown Burnett". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "G".

Gloria Brown Burnett
Interim Secretary

SB771_FAV_EconAction.pdf

Uploaded by: Jennifer Bevan-Dangel

Position: FAV



SB771: Human Services - Energy Assistance Programs - Administration and Funding

Position: Favorable

March 5, 2026

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman, Chair
Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401
Cc: Members of the Committee

Chair Feldman and members of the Committee,

Economic Action Maryland Fund urges a favorable report on SB771, which would make improvements to the state's energy assistance programs.

As the members of this committee are painfully aware, energy rates have risen dramatically in recent years due to a variety of factors. Thousands of Marylanders each year face shutoff notices due to nonpayment, while many others are forced to juggle multi-hundred-dollar utility bills alongside the ever-increasing costs of rent, groceries, and other necessities. In fact, when Economic Action Maryland Fund surveyed our members and other stakeholders this winter, 63% stated utility bills were their primary concern.

Energy assistance is a vital tool in helping low-income Marylanders manage their rising utility costs. The Department of Human Services is better equipped to manage the Electric Universal Service program, as it already manages other energy assistance programs. This move streamlines government services and more efficiently targets the program to households in need of assistance.

Given the escalating costs of fuel, expanding the program is a valuable service to low-income households. This is particularly important because some households may only have gas heat, and those bills were severe this cold winter.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on SB771.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Bevan-Dangel

Economic Action (formerly the Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition) champions economic rights and housing justice through advocacy, research, consumer education, and direct service. Our 12,500 supporters include consumer advocates, practitioners, and low-income and working families throughout Maryland.

2209 Maryland Ave · Baltimore, MD 21218 | www.econaction.org
Marceline White · Marceline@EconAction.org | Jennifer Bevan-Dangel · Jennifer@EconAction.org

SB 771-Favorable- MEAC .pdf

Uploaded by: Laurel Peltier

Position: FAV

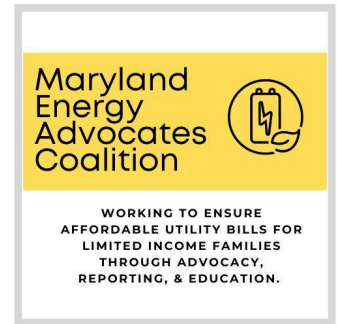
SB 771 Human Services - Energy Assistances Programs Administration and Funding

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

grenlaurel7@comcast.net

SB 771 - FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Megan Peters

Position: FAV



Maryland Senior Citizens Action Network

MSCAN

AARP Maryland

*Baltimore Jewish
Council*

*Catholic Charities of
Baltimore*

*Central Maryland
Ecumenical Council*

Church of the Brethren

*Episcopal Diocese of
Maryland*

*Housing Opportunities
Commission of
Montgomery County*

*Lutheran Office on
Public Policy in
Maryland*

*Maryland Association of
Area Agencies on Aging*

*Maryland Catholic
Conference*

*Mental Health
Association of Maryland*

Mid-Atlantic LifeSpan

*National Association of
Social Workers,
Maryland Chapter*

Presbytery of Baltimore

*The Coordinating
Center*

*MSCAN Co-Chairs:
Carol Lienhard
Megan Peters
410-921-9005*

The Maryland Senior Citizens Action Network (MSCAN) is a statewide coalition of advocacy groups, service providers, faith-based and mission-driven organizations that support policies that meet the housing, health, and quality of care needs of Maryland's low and moderate-income seniors.

MSCAN supports SB 771. This bill takes meaningful steps to strengthen Maryland's energy assistance system, a system that is important to many older adults living on fixed or limited incomes.

Stable and affordable access to energy is essential for the health, safety, and dignity of Maryland's older adults. Many older adults are facing increasingly difficult choices when utility costs rise faster than their incomes - whether to heat their homes, fill their prescriptions, or buy groceries. Energy assistance programs serve as life-preserving supports, preventing catastrophic utility shutoffs and allowing older Marylanders to remain in their homes.

SB 771 strengthens these programs by transferring administration of the Electric Universal Service Program from the Public Service Commission to the Office of Home Energy Programs in the Department of Human Services. This change aligns program oversight with the state entity that already serves households in need, which will help create a more streamlined, coordinated, and user-friendly system.

The bill also enhances Maryland's capacity to respond to energy hardship by expanding authorized uses of the Strategic Energy Investment Fund to include fuel assistance programs. This additional flexibility is crucial for seniors in older or inefficient homes who may rely on multiple heating sources, as well as those living in rural areas with limited utility options. By modernizing the funding framework, SB 771 helps ensure that older Marylanders receive the support that meets their energy needs.

For these reasons, and because access to reliable, affordable energy is foundational to aging in place, MSCAN respectfully requests a favorable report on SB 771.

Testimony in support of SB0771 - Energy Assistance

Uploaded by: Richard KAP Kaplowitz

Position: FAV

SB0771_RichardKaplowitz_FAV

03/05/2026

Richard Keith Kaplowitz

Frederick, MD 21703

TESTIMONY ON SB#0771- POSITION: FAVORABLE

Human Services - Energy Assistance Programs - Administration and Funding

TO: Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

FROM: Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard Keith Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3, Frederick County. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB#0771, **Human Services - Energy Assistance Programs - Administration and Funding**

This bill will change where in Maryland government the administration of the electric universal service program is managed. The electric universal service program assists electric customers with annual incomes at or below 200% of the federal poverty level. The newly empowered Office of Home Energy Programs in the Department of Human Services shall implement and administer the electric universal service program.

Among the duties the office will be assigned are:

- establish minimum and maximum benefits available to an electric customer under the bill assistance and arrearage retirement components
- coordinate benefits under the electric universal service program with benefits under the Maryland Energy Assistance Program and other available energy assistance program
- the office may, with input from a panel or roundtable of interested parties, contract to assist in administering the bill assistance and the arrearage retirement components of the electric universal service program.

Maryland Matters reported in July of 2025 *Energy bills likely to tick up again in 2026 after electricity auction clears at maximum price*¹

Consumers in a 13-state region that includes Maryland could see their electric bills rise another 1.5% to 5% starting in the summer of 2026

In response to this utility rate acceleration's effects this bill will transfer the administration of the electric universal service program from the Public Service Commission to the Office of Home Energy Programs in the Department of Human Services; and alter the authorized uses of the Strategic Energy Investment Fund to include fuel assistance programs.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB#0771.

¹ <https://marylandmatters.org/2025/07/23/energy-bills-likely-to-tick-up-again-in-2026-after-electricity-auction-clears-at-maximum-price/#:~:text=Energy%20bills%20likely%20to,consumers%2Dove%22%3EGov.>

SB 771 Human Services - Energy Assistance Programs

Uploaded by: Sara Westrick

Position: FAV



One Park Place | Suite 475 | Annapolis, MD 21401-3475
1-866-542-8163 | Fax: 410-837-0269
aarp.org/md | md@aarp.org | twitter: @aarpmd
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**SB 771 – Human Services - Energy Assistance Programs - Administration and Funding
Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
March 5, 2026
FAVORABLE**

Good afternoon, Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee. My name is Sara Westrick, and I am the Advocacy Director for AARP Maryland and a resident of Anne Arundel County. We thank President Ferguson for introducing this legislation.

AARP Maryland represents more than 850,000 members across the state, making it one of the largest membership-based organizations advocating for older Marylanders. We are a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering people to live their best lives as they age. Our work focuses on issues that matter most to older adults and their families, including affordable utilities and financial security.

For Maryland's seniors, stable and affordable access to energy is a matter of health, safety, and dignity. Many older adults live on fixed incomes that simply do not keep pace with rising utility costs. When forced to choose between paying for prescriptions, food, or heating their homes, many seniors make unthinkable sacrifices. Programs like the Electric Universal Service Program and fuel assistance are lifelines that prevent these impossible choices.

SB 771 strengthens these critical supports by consolidating energy assistance administration under the Office of Home Energy Programs, allowing for more efficient service delivery and a more streamlined experience for seniors seeking help. The bill also expands the flexibility of existing funds, ensuring that both electric and fuel assistance programs can better meet the unique needs of older adults.

By modernizing administration of the program while preserving oversight, this bill helps ensure that seniors can safely remain in their homes and avoid utility shut-offs.

On behalf of Maryland's older residents, we respectfully urge a favorable report.

If you have any questions, please contact Sara Westrick, AARP Maryland Advocacy Director at swestrick@aarp.org or by calling 410-310-0374.



SB771 Energy Assistance Consolidation - EEE Commit

Uploaded by: Senate President Bill Ferguson

Position: FAV



The Senate of Maryland
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401-1991

SB 771 - Human Services - Energy Assistance Programs - Administration and Funding

Testimony of Senate President Bill Ferguson

On March 5, 2026

Before the Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment

Why This Bill Matters:

The issue that each of us in the General Assembly is hearing about the most is the challenge our constituents are facing with unacceptably high energy bills. Those bills are creating immense strain on families' monthly budgets, too often creating a dynamic where they need to choose between keeping the heat on, or putting food on the table and paying for life-saving medicine.

Fortunately, Maryland has a variety of energy assistance programs that can support Maryland families facing those impossible decisions. The Office of Home Energy Programs administers:

- The Maryland Energy Assistance Program (MEAP);
- The Gas Arrearage Retirement Assistance Program (GARA);
- The Electric Universal Service Program (EUSP); and
- The Electric Arrearage Retirement Assistance Program (EARA).

Unfortunately, an audit by our DLS Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability (OPEGA) released in February of 2025 noted that these programs are confusing for Marylanders to access and navigate. OPEGA recommended that the General Assembly consider merging these energy assistance programs to streamline the application process and get aid out as quickly as possible.

Specifically, OPEGA noted:

Merging the Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP) energy assistance into one program could allow for more flexible allocation of federal LIHEAP funds and State special funds. Currently, the segregation between heating-specific programs (the Maryland Energy Assistance Program (MEAP) and the Gas Arrearage Retirement Assistance Program (GARA)) and electric-specific programs (the Electric Universal

Service Program (EUSP) and the Electric Arrearage Retirement Assistance Program (EARA)) creates an artificial barrier that may prevent households from accessing support, solely because of their heating source, as occurred between April and June of 2024 when federal LIHEAP funding for MEAP and GARA was exhausted.

What This Bill Does:

Due to the timing of the OPEGA audit being released midway through the 2025 Legislative Session, we included an amendment in the Next Generation Energy Act (SB937, 2025) requiring the Department of Human Services (DHS) to report back to the General Assembly what statutory and regulatory changes would be required to consolidate these programs.

Senate Bill 771 is responsive to the DHS report and OPEGA audit recommendation, and merges the State's various energy assistance programs into one streamlined program. This will minimize confusion and eliminate artificial barriers preventing our State's residents from receiving the assistance they are eligible for.

Why You Should Vote for This Bill:

At a moment when Marylanders' need for our State's energy assistance programs have never been greater, the most important thing we can do is make them easier to access. Senate Bill 771 takes the lead from our incredible Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability, which is focused on making our government actually work for the people it serves.

By consolidating these various energy assistance programs with differing timelines and criteria, we can make sure our constituents get the help they need as quickly as possible with as few hurdles as possible. To that end, I respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 771.

Carrington 2026 MCAP SB771 Human Services Energy A

Uploaded by: Darrell Carrington

Position: FWA



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**Senate Bill 771 - Human Services – Energy Assistance Programs –
Administration and Funding
Position: Support with Amendments**

Maryland Community Action Partnership (MCAP) supports SB771 and appreciates the sponsor's effort to strengthen the State's commitment to coordinated, accountable anti-poverty programming. The bill reflects a thoughtful attempt to bring structure, transparency, and strategic direction to an important funding stream. With several clarifying amendments, SB771 can both achieve its policy objectives and reinforce Maryland's existing Community Action infrastructure.

First, with respect to governance and fund distribution, MCAP recommends an amendment that explicitly recognizes designated Community Action Agencies (CAAs), as defined under the federal Community Services Block Grant Act, as primary community-based delivery partners within their established service areas. This would not limit the State's authority to administer the program, but it would ensure that implementation aligns with the long-standing tripartite governance structure and locally driven needs assessment process already embedded in federal law. Clear statutory language affirming coordination with, or pass-through to, designated CAAs where applicable would avoid duplication of administrative structures and maximize service impact.

Second, on program flexibility, MCAP recommends adding language that permits reasonable local discretion in the use of funds, consistent with statewide goals. Community Action Agencies operate in urban, suburban, and rural jurisdictions with materially different economic conditions. Allowing funds to be used across core anti-poverty categories such as housing stabilization, utility assistance, workforce development, financial empowerment, and case management ensures that agencies can respond to documented community needs. An amendment clarifying that funds may be used broadly for anti-poverty and economic mobility purposes, rather than confined to a narrow set of line items, would strengthen implementation without undermining legislative intent.

Third, regarding administrative costs and compliance, MCAP recommends incorporating an explicit administrative allowance consistent with federal CSBG standards. CAAs already comply with extensive federal and state reporting, audit, and performance measurement requirements under the oversight of the State of Maryland's Department of Housing and Community Development. To avoid creating an unfunded mandate, SB771 should authorize a reasonable percentage of funds for administration, oversight, and required reporting. In addition, aligning any new reporting requirements with existing ROMA or other federal performance frameworks would promote accountability while minimizing duplication.

Fourth, on eligibility and coordination, MCAP recommends clarifying that if additional community-based entities are eligible to receive funds under SB771, those entities must coordinate with the designated CAA serving the same geographic area. This amendment

would preserve collaborative service delivery and avoid fragmentation of limited resources. Maryland's Community Action network has decades of experience delivering integrated, wraparound services, and formal coordination language would leverage that infrastructure rather than inadvertently bypass it.

Finally, with respect to fiscal stability, MCAP encourages inclusion of language establishing a recurring funding source or clear appropriation intent to ensure program continuity. Agencies require predictable funding to retain staff, enter into service contracts, and plan multi-year strategies. Clarifying legislative intent for ongoing support would provide the stability necessary for meaningful outcomes.

With these amendments, SB771 can strengthen accountability and strategic alignment at the State level while preserving the local flexibility and governance model that have defined the Community Action framework for decades. MCAP stands ready to work with the sponsor and the Committee to refine the language so that the bill achieves its goals and enhances Maryland's capacity to reduce poverty and promote economic mobility statewide.

Submitted on behalf of MCAP by Carrington & Associates, LLC. Please contact Executive Director, Angela Martin, at amartin@maryland-cap.org for additional information.

SB 771 - FWA- Human Services - Energy Assistance P

Uploaded by: Megan Outten

Position: FWA



Maryland

Energy Administration

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

FROM: MEA

SUBJECT: HB 596 - Large Load Customers - Electric System Interconnection and Demand Response Program

DATE: March 3, 2026

MEA Position: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

The Maryland Energy Administration (MEA) respectfully submits this letter in support of Senate Bill 771 (SB771) with amendments.

SB 771 makes a meaningful administrative improvement by transferring implementation and administration of the Electric Universal Service Program (EUSP) to the Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP) within the Department of Human Services (DHS). Locating administration with OHEP, Maryland's primary low-income energy assistance administrator, supports a more coordinated, customer-centered approach to bill assistance, arrearage retirement, and program delivery. This alignment can reduce administrative friction for households seeking support and strengthen Maryland's capacity to deliver benefits efficiently and equitably.

The bill also updates the authorized uses of the Maryland Strategic Energy Investment Fund (SEIF) to include fuel assistance programs administered by DHS, and clarifies that a significant portion of allowance proceeds credited to the energy assistance account may support both electricity and fuel assistance. MEA respectfully requests an amendment to remove or clarify language that could be interpreted as directing SEIF and allowance proceeds to support fossil fuel consumption, rather than supporting energy affordability in a manner consistent with Maryland's clean energy and greenhouse gas reduction goals.

Specifically, the bill's expansion of SEIF and the energy assistance account to include "fuel assistance" could be read to include fossil fuels without limitation. MEA recommends amending the bill to ensure that any expanded assistance authority is framed as household energy assistance that preserves flexibility for near-term affordability needs, while avoiding statutory direction that prioritizes or entrenches fossil fuel use.

This amendment approach maintains the bill's core purpose of helping Marylanders keep the lights on and homes safely heated, while ensuring SEIF remains aligned with Maryland's clean energy transition and long-term affordability strategy. Programs that reduce energy burden through efficiency

and weatherization are among the most durable forms of bill relief and reduce exposure to volatile fuel prices over time.

For these reasons, MEA respectfully requests a **favorable report with amendments**. Thank you for your consideration. For additional information, please contact Megan Outten, Policy Manager, at megan.outten@maryland.gov or 443-842-1780.

Senate Bill 771 - FWA.pdf

Uploaded by: Tom Coale

Position: FWA

Senate Bill 771 – Human Services – Energy Assistance Programs – Administration and Funding

Position: Support with Amendment

Submitted by: Efficient Home, LLC

Committee: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Date: March 5, 2026

Chair and Members of the Committee:

Efficient Home, LLC respectfully submits this written testimony in support of Senate Bill 771, with a recommended amendment to strengthen coordination between Maryland’s energy assistance programs and energy efficiency programs serving low-income households.

Efficient Home, LLC is a Maryland-based energy efficiency contractor headquartered in Burtonsville. For more than a decade, our company has delivered residential, multifamily, and commercial energy audits, weatherization services, and building performance upgrades throughout Maryland. We have participated in utility-sponsored EmPOWER Maryland programs and have extensive experience serving income-qualified households facing high energy burdens.

Senate Bill 771 takes an important step by transferring administration of the electric universal service program to the Office of Home Energy Programs within the Department of Human Services. Aligning energy assistance with other human services programs has the potential to improve delivery, accessibility, and coordination of benefits.

However, while bill assistance addresses immediate arrearages, it does not reduce the underlying drivers of high energy costs. Energy efficiency and weatherization improvements — including insulation, air sealing, HVAC upgrades, and related services — provide long-term, structural reductions in monthly energy bills. Connecting eligible households to these programs reduces repeat arrearages and strengthens the effectiveness of public assistance dollars.

In our experience, many households who qualify for energy bill assistance are also eligible for EmPOWER Maryland income-qualified energy efficiency programs, but without a formal referral mechanism, participation rates remain lower than they should be. A simple coordination requirement would meaningfully improve program outcomes.

Accordingly, we respectfully recommend the following amendment.

Proposed Amendment Language

Insert in the section of the bill transferring administration of the electric universal service program to the Office of Home Energy Programs:

(X) The Office of Home Energy Programs shall coordinate with the Maryland Energy Administration, electric and gas utilities, and approved energy efficiency program implementers to establish a referral process to ensure that each household receiving assistance under the electric universal service program:

(1) Is informed of the availability of income-qualified energy efficiency and weatherization services funded under EmPOWER Maryland and related state or utility programs; and

(2) Is provided, where appropriate, with a direct referral or facilitated enrollment into such programs.

(Y) The Office may enter into data-sharing agreements, consistent with applicable privacy laws, as necessary to implement this subsection.

This amendment would:

- Reduce long-term energy burdens for low-income Maryland households
- Improve cost-effectiveness of universal service funds
- Lower repeat arrearages
- Strengthen coordination across state-administered and utility-administered programs
- Advance Maryland's energy efficiency and equity goals

By pairing short-term financial assistance with long-term energy savings strategies, Maryland can move toward a more sustainable and integrated approach to energy affordability.

For these reasons, Efficient Home, LLC respectfully supports Senate Bill 771 and urges favorable consideration with the proposed amendment.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Please feel free to contact me for any additional information regarding the requested amendment:

Tom Coale
tom@perryjacobson.com
443-630-0507