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Environment and Transportation  
Committee

Subcommittees

Chair, Energy

Environment

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Chair Korman,

I am writing in favor of **HB1516/SB 771 Human Services - Energy Assistance Programs - Administration and Funding**.

Marylanders are facing increasingly high energy bills. Over the past ten to fifteen years, most utility customers have seen their bills rise substantially, with some rates doubling or even tripling.<sup>1</sup> Recent data show that residential energy rates have risen 44-percent since 2020.<sup>2</sup> For Marylanders struggling to afford these costs or facing service interruptions due to missed payments, the Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP) provides a critical lifeline.

In fiscal year 2025, OHEP received over 156,000 applications.<sup>3</sup> Funded by state special funds and the federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), OHEP manages several distinct programs for low-income households: 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). While MEAP and EUSP focus on bill affordability, GARA and EARA are designed to restore or maintain service for those who have fallen behind on payments.

A February 2025 performance review by the nonpartisan Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability (OPEGA) highlighted significant inefficiencies in this structure.<sup>4</sup> OHEP is an office within the Family Investment Administration of the Department of Human Services (DHS). The report recommended, “[t]he General Assembly could consider merging energy assistance programs into one energy assistance program jointly funded by

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<sup>1</sup> State of Maryland, Office of the People’s Counsel (OPC), Maryland’s Utility Rates and Charges (2024), accessed [https://opc.maryland.gov/Portals/0/Files/Publications/Reports/Utility%20Rates%20PowerPoint%202025%20update%202023-11-25.pdf?ver=WE3Jb51AWghiYWH\\_u9RLrA%3d%3d](https://opc.maryland.gov/Portals/0/Files/Publications/Reports/Utility%20Rates%20PowerPoint%202025%20update%202023-11-25.pdf?ver=WE3Jb51AWghiYWH_u9RLrA%3d%3d)

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), API Dashboard (n.d.), accessed <https://www.eia.gov/opendata/browser/electricity/retail-sales?frequency=monthly&data=price;&facets=stateid;sectorid;&stateid=MD;&sectorid=RES;&sortColumn=period;&sortDirection=desc>

<sup>3</sup> State of Maryland, Department of Human Services (DHS), Office of Home Energy Programs Monthly Data (n.d.), <https://dhs.maryland.gov/documents/OHEP/OHEP%20Monthly%20Data/FY26/2025-11%20November/Public%20Report%20November%202025.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> State of Maryland, Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability (OPEGA), *Evaluation of the Office of Home Energy Programs* (Feb. 2025), accessed <https://dls.maryland.gov/pubs/prod/ProgEval/EvalofOHEP.pdf>

federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and State Special Funds.”<sup>5</sup> Currently, the strict partitioning between heating-specific, gas, and electric programs creates artificial barriers that can prevent households from receiving aid simply because of their energy source.

HB 1516 addresses these issues by collapsing these fragmented initiatives into one holistic, eligibility based program. This shift ensures greater flexibility and directs relief to those who need it most. Under the current system, one program may exhaust its funding while another remains underutilized due to overly complex or burdensome requirements. HB 1516 streamlines the experience for applicants and allows for more efficient service delivery. Furthermore, this legislation expands the flexibility of existing funds so that assistance better meets the unique needs of all Marylanders, regardless of whether their homes are heated by gas or electricity. As the General Assembly continues to seek solutions for rising energy costs, it is vital that we provide support in the most effective manner possible.

This legislation is a necessary step toward better organization and more accessible aid for Maryland families. I urge a favorable report of HB 1516/SB 771.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Fraser-Hidalgo". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "F".

Delegate David Fraser-Hidalgo

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<sup>5</sup> Id.