

House Bill 138 Department of Human Services – Electric Universal Service Program - Eligibility

Economic Matters Committee
January 20, 2021

Support

Catholic Charities of Baltimore supports HB 138, which would require the Department of Human Services to allow individuals to apply separately for the Electric Universal Service Program and the Maryland Energy Assistance Program.

Inspired by the Gospel mandates to love, serve and teach, Catholic Charities provides care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. As the largest human service provider in Maryland working with tens of thousands of youth, individuals, and families each year, we recognize the inherent dignity within all Marylanders.

Since 1963, immigrants from all over the world have trusted the Esperanza Center, a Catholic Charities program, to help them navigate life in a new country. Through this work, we have witnessed the enormous contribution immigrant families make to our communities. Immigrant workers cultivate and harvest the food we eat, they construct the buildings we live in, they serve as domestic workers, and they offer their hospitality in restaurants and hotels. They are our neighbors and our friends. They are also taxpayers and ratepayers. Yet, when the pandemic struck, many were excluded from the economic relief programs. They didn't qualify for unemployment. They were not sent stimulus payments. Often, their occupations did not permit remote working. They either risked their health to continue working or risked the economic security of their families by following public health warnings to stay home.

Catholic Charities responded by adjusting our services and standing up two hotlines – one a bilingual hotline to assist Marylanders in accessing public benefits and the other to offer health advice and resources to non-English speakers. Through both hotlines we heard the heartbreaking stories of immigrant families trying to remain healthy while still trying to provide for their children. While we could refer callers to information about COVID-19 and to schedule testing, there were few programs we could refer callers to if no one in the household had a Social Security Number.

This bill recognizes that all ratepayers should be eligible for our state's Electric Universal Service Program. We should not be using federal standards established for a different program to determine eligibility for a program funded by Maryland ratepayers.

Our entire society suffers when there is economic instability amongst a segment of our neighbors—requiring DHS to apply only the statutory eligibility criteria for EUSP would help to keep the lights and heat on for all Marylanders. **On behalf of the individuals and families we work with, Catholic Charities of Baltimore appreciates your consideration of our views and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for HB 138.**

Submitted By: Regan K. Vaughan, Director of Advocacy