

Hon. Lourdes R. Padilla
Secretary
Maryland Department of Human Services
311 West Saratoga Street
Baltimore, MD 21201

Dear Secretary Padilla:

On February 22nd, the Economic Matters committee discussed at length *HB 606 — Emergency Bill — Electricity and Gas – Limited–Income Mechanisms and Assistance*. This emergency bill would authorize utility companies to adopt a limited-income mechanism to benefit eligible customers, subject to the approval of the Public Service Commission (PSC), thus expanding the methods available to alleviate the energy burden on Marylanders who struggle with economic insecurity. The bill has passed and is awaiting the Governor's signature.

As you know, Maryland statute established Electric Universal Service Program (EUSP) to provide assistance with electricity bills, and to supplement funds provided by Maryland Energy Assistance Program (MEAP), which comes from a larger block grant program funded by the Federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). These grants provide assistance to low-income households in the state of Maryland to help make their energy costs more affordable and to help with the prevention of loss and the restoration of home energy service.

In our Committee discussions on HB606, two specific concerns were raised about the existing programs in OHEP. It was determined that both of these issues can be addressed by regulatory or administrative changes and I am writing to ask you to make these changes to make these programs more accessible to struggling Marylanders.

1. **Make EUSP available to those who pay their electric bills through their condominium fee or rent:** Funds for EUSP are collected from all Maryland rate-payers, including those who pay their electric bills through their rent or condo fees. Yet the OHEP process to apply for and receive assistance only allows individuals who have a utility bill in their own name to apply for EUSP funds. OHEP has a process for those who pay their utilities through condo fees or rent to apply for MEAP. My request is that you extend this process to allow these individuals to apply for EUSP as well. This can be facilitated by changing the definition of “electric customer” in COMAR *07.03.22.02* to define an electric customer as any individual responsible for the costs of electric service regardless of how those electric costs are paid.

2. **Allow Marylanders to either apply for EUSP and MEAP together or to apply directly to EUSP without requiring the documentation required by LIHEAP:** Public Utilities Article 7-512.1 (A, 4) gives OHEP the ability to coordinate EUSP benefits, with benefits from MEAP and other assistance programs. The goal in this statute is to streamline the application process for Maryland residents seeking help. However, OHEP currently determines eligibility using the federal LIHEAP requirements. The result is that Maryland residents who should be eligible for EUSP benefits, but are not eligible for MEAP benefits, are not able to apply for any benefits. Specifically, households that do not have anyone with a social security number are not able to apply for LIHEAP funds. The current structure also excludes them from EUSP assistance. It was never the intention of the Maryland General Assembly to deny these households EUSP funds (which they also pay into every month with their electric bills). My request is that you modify COMAR 07.03.22.03 so that individuals with no one in their home meeting the LIHEAP criteria have the ability to apply for EUSP funds.

I look forward to hearing your plans to address these issues.

Sincerely,

Delegate Dereck E. Davis
Chair
Economic Matters Committee

cc:
Bill Freeman
Director, Office of Home Energy Programs