



SB 283- Department of Human Services- Electric Universal Service Program- Eligibility
Senate Finance Committee
February 1, 2022
SUPPORT

Chairwoman Kelley, Vice-chair, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 283. This bill will require the Department of Human Services to authorize benefits under the electric universal service program for certain electric customers.

The CASH Campaign of Maryland promotes economic advancement for low-to-moderate income individuals and families in Baltimore and across Maryland. CASH accomplishes its mission through operating a portfolio of direct service programs, building organizational and field capacity, and leading policy and advocacy initiatives to strengthen family economic stability. CASH and its partners across the state achieve this by providing free tax preparation services through the IRS program 'VITA', offering free financial education and coaching, and engaging in policy research and advocacy. **Almost 4,000 of CASH's tax preparation clients earn less than \$10,000 annually. More than half earn less than \$20,000.**

There are two significant energy assistance programs in Maryland, managed by the Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP) in the Department of Human Services (DHS). The Electric Universal Service Program (EUSP) and the Maryland Energy Assistance Program (MEAP) both assist low-income Marylanders in paying their energy bills. OHEP uses one consolidated application process for both programs. However, two programs have slightly different eligibility requirements. Using one application prevents households who are eligible for EUSP but not eligible for MEAP from accessing EUSP assistance. Unfortunately, immigrant households are not eligible for many federal assistance programs. **By processing all applications using federal requirements, immigrant households are not eligible for the state energy assistance program they pay into.** All Maryland utilities accounts pay into EUSP; however, not all Maryland utilities account holders can access those funds if needed.

COVID-19 created a significant need for assistance for many low-income households across Maryland. The global pandemic lowered immigrant family's capability to cover their electricity cost in many ways. Main wage earners are more at risk for being exposed to COVID-19 or working for one of the many industries that were negatively affected by the pandemic. Children were attending school from home which also drove up expected energy costs. Not having access to electricity and energy assistance will leave families without access to heat/AC, safe food, medical equipment, and more essentials.

SB 283 will allow for more families to receive assistance by requiring DHS to establish a process for Marylanders who are eligible for EUSP, but not eligible for MEAP, to apply for and receive utility assistance from EUSP. Ultimately, this bill ensures that all Maryland households will receive energy assistance, as intended.

For these reasons, we encourage you to return a favorable report for SB 238.

Creating Assets, Savings and Hope