



Welfare Advocates

Founded 1979

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Senate Bill 283

Department of Human Services – Electric Universal Service Program - Eligibility

Senate Finance Committee

February 1, 2022

Support

Welfare Advocates is a statewide coalition of social service organizations, advocacy groups, faith communities, and community members, whose mission it is to educate ourselves, and the wider community and to advocate for an adequate safety net and public policies that support families moving towards economic stability.

Welfare Advocates supports SB 283, which requires the Department of Human Services to create a separate application and authorization process for the Electric Universal Service Program (EUSP) unlinked to the their processes related to the Federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

Energy Assistance is a critical safety-net program for low-income households overburdened with energy costs in Maryland. The Electric Universal Service Program is one of two major energy assistance programs in Maryland, and it is partially funded through a utility rate payer surcharge. EUSP is disbursed as a grant credited to the household electricity bill in 12 monthly credits, and is paid directly to qualified electric utilities.

EUSP was designed to be widely available to households that meet the income requirements; however, because the current application process is consolidated with the application for Federal LIHEAP, many Maryland households are – literally – left out in the cold. While consolidated applications are great for households who meet qualifications for several programs, it is an enormous barrier for households who may only qualify for a single program. Requiring DHS to establish a separate application process for households who only qualify for our state EUSP will ensure more low-income households in Maryland struggling to pay for their energy needs will be able to access assistance. Without this critical change, there will continue to be low-income families in Maryland facing impossible decisions about which basic need – like power or heat – they will forgo in their limited budgets.

All Maryland rate-payer households in who need energy assistance through EUSP should be able to access the state-funded program, regardless of if they are eligible for federally funded benefits. **WA appreciates your consideration, and respectfully urges a favorable report on SB 283.**

Submitted by Lisa Klingenmaier, Chair of Welfare Advocates
