



Maryland

Department of Human Services

Report on the Status of Implementation of Categorical Eligibility

Completed pursuant to the 2024 Joint Chairmen's Report, pages 156-157

January 15, 2025

REPORT REQUIREMENT

This report is hereby submitted in response to the following report requirement:

The committees are interested in receiving updates on the impact of changes in eligibility for energy assistance programs due to Chapter 207 of 2023 and request that the Department of Human Services (DHS) submit a report on the status of implementation of categorical eligibility for energy assistance, including an update on the status of the integration of the Office of Home Energy Programs data system within the Eligibility and Enrollment component of the Maryland Total Human Services Integrated Network platform, and the status of ongoing system maintenance to improve customer service. Additionally, the report should include a discussion of the number of additional households with incomes between 175% and 200% of the federal poverty level determined to be newly eligible for energy assistance benefits during the second half of fiscal 2024 and 2025, current through November 1, 2024, as a result of income eligibility changes implemented through Chapter 207 of 2023, and the adequacy of funding levels for energy assistance in the fiscal 2025 allowance to meet the increased number of recipients of benefits.

Source: 2025 Joint Chairmen's Report, pages 156-157

OVERVIEW

The Department of Human Services' (DHS) Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP) is responsible for administering the Electric Universal Service Program (EUSP) and the Maryland Energy Assistance Program (MEAP). The goal of EUSP is to help make electric bills more affordable for low-income families by providing bill payment assistance and arrearage retirement assistance. MEAP, which is Maryland's implementation of the federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, shares the goal of helping low-income households with their home energy bills. MEAP provides benefits for all types of heating, including electric, gas, propane, oil, kerosene, coal and wood. MEAP is 100 percent federally funded.

IMPACT OF CHANGES IN ELIGIBILITY FOR ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS AS A RESULT OF CHAPTER 207 OF 2023

[Chapter 207 of 2023](#) introduced significant changes to eligibility and enrollment for energy assistance programs in Maryland—emphasizing expanded access and streamlined enrollment. The legislation established categorical eligibility and automatic enrollment for households with members eligible for programs such as SNAP, TANF, SSI, and means-tested Veterans Affairs benefits, ensuring these households are seamlessly enrolled in fuel and utility assistance programs. Additionally, the income eligibility threshold for the Electric Universal Service Program (EUSP) was increased from 175% to 200% of the federal poverty level, broadening the program's reach.

The Act also mandates integrating the Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP) data system with the MD THINK platform to enhance operational efficiency and simplify eligibility determinations. These changes, effective January 1, 2024, were designed to improve accessibility, streamline processes, and ensure timely support for Maryland households.

Integrating the OHEP data management system with MD THINK significantly improved access to energy assistance programs and streamlined the application process by enabling automatic enrollment for categorically eligible households. Initial integration work, completed prior to implementing categorical eligibility in January 2024, laid the foundation for these advancements. Additional system enhancements identified during the first six months of implementation further refined the process. By the start of state fiscal year 2025 (SFY25), critical improvements—such as system data matching, autogenerating customer notices, and updates to program applications to capture utility provider information—were successfully completed, with further work ongoing. A comprehensive roadmap for full integration was developed with completion anticipated by January 2026.

Customer service was enhanced by implementing worker email alerts, automating approval and denial notices, and standardizing case narration; all of which improved transparency, communication, and case handling. The upcoming rollout of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to all local OHEP offices in February 2025 is expected to strengthen OHEP customer service for Marylanders.

The DHS Call Center will initiate work orders and transfer hot calls directly to local agencies, further enhancing service delivery.

Expanding income eligibility thresholds for home energy assistance contributed to an increase in households receiving energy assistance benefits, with OHEP experiencing a record number of applications in SFY24. While funding levels were adjusted to accommodate this growth, a full year of data will provide a clearer understanding of the adequacy of resources to support the increasing demand.

UPDATE ON THE INTEGRATION OF THE OHEP DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEM WITH DHS'S NEW ENROLLMENT AND ELIGIBILITY SYSTEM

OHEP completed a partial integration with the MDTHINK Eligibility and Enrollment (E&E) system for the January 1, 2024 implementation of categorical eligibility. Through integration, relevant application information for households receiving SNAP, TANF, SSI, and means-tested Veterans Affairs benefits were transferred from MDTHINK to the OHEP Data Management System to enable automatic enrollment into energy assistance programs. Improvements were also made to the MDTHINK Consumer Portal, enhancing client access to home energy assistance, along with back-end system and technical updates.

During the first six months of implementing categorical eligibility, additional system enhancements were identified to further streamline the process and support automatic enrollment. In the first quarter of SFY25, several key improvements were implemented: data matching between households in the E&E system and the OHEP data management system, filtering out categorically eligible households that are not responsible for heating or cooling expenses and therefore not eligible for energy assistance, and an automated Request for Additional Information (RAI) for categorically eligible households lacking utility information in the E&E or OHEP systems. These enhancements and automation enable local agencies to focus on completing applications that can be processed thereby improving processing times. Additionally, DHS updated program applications and the consumer portal to capture households' utility provider information upfront, reducing the need for RAIs and increasing approval times.

A roadmap for full E&E integration was developed in 2024 as the need was discovered. System changes will begin in January 2025 and likely take a full year to complete.

UPDATE ON THE STATUS OF ONGOING SYSTEM MAINTENANCE TO IMPROVE CUSTOMER SERVICE

System maintenance efforts are ongoing, with several key improvements implemented to enhance customer service including:

- **OHEP Worker Email Alerts:** Staff are now notified when customers submit documents through the Consumer Portal, enabling timely updates to customer information and application completion.

- **Automated Approval and Denial Notices:** Customers now receive prompt correspondence with information needed to address incomplete applications, reapply, or appeal decisions, ensuring a more efficient application process.

Additional enhancements include: updating program notices to make them easier to understand, providing system training to all Local Administrating Agencies (LAAs) including how to use interfaces to obtain information for a customer, policy training and standardizing case narration to ensure local processing agencies are operating in compliance with program requirements. The standardized case narration also allows DHS Customer Service Center staff and other users with OHEP system access to view the actions taken on a case to share with a customer, improving transparency and coordination.

Starting January 1, 2025, all OHEP LAAs will have access to DHS’s new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. Training for the CRM is scheduled for December 2024. This system will enable the DHS Call Center to transfer "hot calls" to local agencies and submit work orders for resolution at the local level.

UPDATE ON THE NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS SERVED WITH INCOME BETWEEN 175% AND 200% OF FEDERAL POVERTY AS A RESULT OF INCOME ELIGIBILITY CHANGES IMPLEMENTED THROUGH CHAPTER 207 OF 2023

The chart below shows the number of households with incomes between 175% and 200% of the federal poverty level who received Energy Assistance, by benefit type, as the result of income eligible changes implemented through Chapter 207 of 2023 by specified time periods.

	MEAP	EUSP	EARA	GARA
January 1, 2024-June 30, 2024	5,212	3,929	1,421	239
July 1, 2024-December 1, 2024	2,671	2,451	702	214

THE ADEQUACY OF FUNDING LEVELS FOR ENERGY ASSISTANCE IN THE FISCAL YEAR 2025 ALLOWANCE TO MEET THE INCREASED NUMBER OF RECIPIENTS OF BENEFITS

In the first year of implementing categorical eligibility and automatic enrollment for home energy programs, DHS projected an increase of approximately 79,000 households receiving energy assistance benefits. To address this growth, benefit levels were adjusted to ensure all eligible households can receive assistance. Despite these efforts, DHS exhausted Maryland Energy Assistance Program (MEAP) dollars, which are federally funded, by April 2024 as a record-high number of Marylanders sought energy assistance benefits in State Fiscal Year 2024 (SFY24). We received 243,252 applications during SFY24, 70% more than the year before, and provided over 94,000 households MEAP benefits and over 112,000 households with EUSP benefits.

Based on data from the first six months of SFY24, DHS now anticipates serving 270,000 households in SFY25. In response, benefit levels for FY25 were adjusted to accommodate this significant expansion. The attached table shows SFY25 benefit levels.

After a full year of data from implementing categorical eligibility and automatic enrollment, as well as the increased income threshold, DHS will be better equipped to assess whether current funding levels are adequate to meet the growing number of program participants.

Attachment: State FY2025 MEAP Benefit Matrix (June 27, 2024)

Primary Heat Source	Level 1 0-25%FPL	Level 2 26-50%FPL	Level 3 51-100%FPL	Level 4 101-150% FPL	Level 5 151-200% FPL	Level 6 Subsidized/ Sub metered	Level 7 Over 200%FPL CE Only
Electric	\$102	\$102	\$102	\$102	\$102	\$102	\$25
Gas	\$301	\$241	\$210	\$181	\$150	\$102	\$25
Oil	\$750	\$600	\$525	\$450	\$375	\$102	\$25
Propane	\$644	\$515	\$450	\$386	\$321	\$102	\$25
Wood/Coal	\$418	\$334	\$292	\$250	\$209	\$102	\$25

***Flat Rates**

Household Size	Level 1 0-25% FPL	Level 2 26-50%FPL	Level 3 51-100%FPL	Level 4 101-150% FPL	Level 5 151-200% FPL
1	\$0 - 314	\$315 - 628	\$629 - 1,255	\$1,256 - 1,883	\$1,884 - 2,510
2	\$0 - 426	\$427 - 852	\$853 - 1,703	\$1,704 - 2,555	\$2,556 - 3,407
3	\$0 - 538	\$539 - 1,076	\$1,077 - 2,152	\$2,153 - 3,228	\$3,229 - 4,303
4	\$0 - 650	\$651 - 1,300	\$1,301 - 2,600	\$2,601 - 3,900	\$3,901 - 5,200
5	\$0 - 762	\$763 - 1,524	\$1,525 - 3,048	\$3,049 - 4,573	\$4,574 - 6,097
6	\$0 - 874	\$875 - 1,748	\$1,749 - 3,497	\$3,498 - 5,245	\$5,246 - 6,993
7	\$0 - 986	\$987 - 1,973	\$1,974 - 3,945	\$3,946 - 5,918	\$5,919 - 7,890
8	\$0 - 1,098	\$1,099 - 2,197	\$2,198 - 4,393	\$4,394 - 6,590	\$6,591 - 8,787
+	\$112 per additional household member	\$224 per additional household member	\$448 per additional household member	\$672 per additional household member	\$896 per additional household member