



What Maryland Can Do to Improve Energy Affordability: Snapshot

October 2026

Unaffordable utility bills are stressing Maryland families, with [a recent poll](#) showing that over half of the respondents were worried about their ability to pay their utility bills. Unfortunately, Marylanders will be challenged with rising energy bills for years to come due to [utility rate increases](#) and issues such as the PJM power grid operator's expensive policy failures in handling the [increased load growth](#) from Virginia's data centers.

Maryland has taken important steps to help financially struggling households and can do even more to help families afford their energy bills. Affordability programs help families to stay connected to utility service and can also provide benefits for non-participating ratepayers. Utility affordability programs appear to have very little impact on utility revenues and [can benefit all ratepayers](#) by reducing bad debt, avoiding financing costs, reducing the number of collection actions, and reducing disconnections.

Maryland households eligible for low-income energy assistance from the state Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP) paid an average of [14 percent of their income](#) on home energy costs. In November 2023, the Maryland Public Service Commission (PSC) initiated Public Conference 59 (PC59) following a 2021 law requiring utilities to adopt a benefit program for customers of limited means. Through the hard work of a productive stakeholder working group in PC 59, Maryland's regulated electric and gas companies will be implementing a tiered discount program in January 2027. Customers of these utilities who apply for energy assistance through OHEP will automatically receive utility help designed to make their energy bills affordable .

There is still more that Maryland can do. For example, it can help households with older adults, which participate in OHEP at a [much lower rate](#) than other households with limited means. And it must help the large number of Marylanders burdened with utility debt; low-income customers had over [\\$42 million in arrearages](#) in FY 2026.

Maryland leadership should consider the following recommendations to lower household utility costs immediately and in the long-term:

- **Help households with utility debt get back on their feet with AMPs.** The PSC should be directed to implement an Arrearage Management Program (AMP) for OHEP customers. AMPs [help customers](#) to resolve utility debt and to pay their future bills.
- **Make sure that utility assistance reaches eligible families.**
 - **Fund outreach and promotion of the residential customer assistance program (R-CAP),** which will immediately help limited-means Marylanders afford their utility bills.
 - **Use the SNAP participation database to identify and enroll eligible low-income older adults into OHEP assistance.** One population that is harder to reach with energy assistance is older adults, particularly in rural parts of the

state. Direct DHS to identify households participating in SNAP but not enrolled in DHS Office of Home Energy Programs assistance. Support outreach by OHEP local agencies to contact these households and enroll them in energy assistance.

- **Fund non-profits to offer case management (navigators)** to limited income homeowners to help them navigate and stack all available energy efficiency and clean energy benefits and incentives (including EmPOWER and MEA clean energy incentives). Direct all relevant agencies to make it easier for low-income OHEP customers to enroll in community solar so they can benefit from the discounted rate.
- **Support more resources for energy efficiency programs, especially those that help economically disadvantaged households.** Provide support to address poor housing conditions that could stand in the way of energy efficiency improvements.
- **Help the public participate in utility commission proceedings.** Maryland should identify and lower the barriers to meaningful participation by environmental justice and under resourced communities in utility commission and energy agency proceedings. These are communities that are [overly impacted](#) by rate hikes and face burdens in accessing incentives for energy efficiency and clean energy opportunities. More public participation can lead to increased accountability and better outcomes.
- **Listen to the local communities that object to having data centers.** If a community decides to move forward with a data center, regulators must ensure that there are long-lasting, tangible, and meaningful benefits defined by the affected communities. Regulators must also ensure that the air and water quality are not degraded.

Don't make things worse. Avoid these potentially harmful ideas:

- **Do not shrink investments in energy efficiency programs,** particularly programs targeted to households with limited means.
- **Do not displace energy efficiency programs with more household debt.** Under-resourced families should be served with low-cost or no-cost energy efficiency and home electrification programs, not financing that could add to the household debt burden and increase the risk of utility disconnection.
- **Do not propose prepaid utility service to address affordability.** With prepaid service, struggling households are at greater risk of disconnection and lose protections that provide sufficient time to apply for energy assistance, as well as other important utility consumer protections.

Maryland should keep building on its work to ensure that families can afford their utility bills and that even the most under-resourced households are not left behind.

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