



WES MOORE
Governor
ARUNA MILLER
Lt. Governor
JACOB R. DAY
Secretary
JULIA GLANZ
Deputy Secretary

December 31, 2024

Governor Wes Moore
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

President Bill Ferguson
H-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

Speaker Adrienne Jones
H-101, State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Green and Healthy Task Force report

Dear Governor Moore, President Ferguson, and Speaker Jones;

The Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development, together with the Green and Healthy Task Force members, is submitting this report to satisfy the following required report per law:

Public Utilities Article §7–224 (h), due December 31, 2024

The Task Force, along with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) have been meeting since July 2023 and previously submitted a report fulfilling a similar requirement in December of 2023. This report attached is an updated and extended version of the previously submitted report based on the requirements set forth within the law.

Thank you,

Jake Day
Green and Healthy Task Force Chair and DHCD Secretary



GREEN AND HEALTHY TASK FORCE REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The Green and Healthy Task Force was created in 2023 through HB169 and is defined in Public Utilities Article §7-315. In 2024, HB864 required DHCD to collaborate with the Task Force to create a plan to provide a whole home approach that addresses health and safety upgrades, weatherization, energy efficiency, and other general maintenance for low-income housing. The plan must coordinate funding sources and leverage the greatest funding possible, and ensure that there is a single point of contact for low-income residential households, and services are offered in any language needed by the low-income residential households.

DHCD has been internally working to create a whole home approach by integrating its energy programs with its rehabilitation programs, and has been meeting with the Task Force on a monthly basis to discuss the cornerstones of the approach. This report summarizes the discussions and lays out an actionable plan.

This report addresses the following items:

1. Whole Home Concept
2. Whole Home Plan
3. Single Point of Contact
4. Language Requirements

1. WHOLE HOME CONCEPT

The Department is adopting a holistic approach to overcome barriers to upgrading low-income homes that includes health and safety upgrades, energy efficiency upgrades, appliance electrification, and other critical housing improvements. Best practices⁽¹⁾ suggest that any related applicable services should be included in home retrofit projects.

The Task Force discussed applicable services and supported the inclusion of electrification and other clean energy initiatives, such as solar energy generation, when they are available for the same households. DHCD is collaborating with MEA, MDE, and MCEC to gain access to funding for such electrification and clean energy projects. Additionally, DHCD submitted a request to the Public Service Commission to allow electrification under the EmPOWER Program that was approved on December 27th, 2024. Task Force members emphasized that electrification is beneficial to the participants and not detrimental to their utility costs. For any program that allows electrification, DHCD develops a process that is influenced by stakeholder input to define what circumstances make an electrification project beneficial.

The Whole Home concept is delivered through a One Stop Shop, which streamlines services. Through the One Stop Shop (OSS), a participant can access all necessary resources, services, and support for their

¹ [Green and Healthy Homes Initiative Report: Charting a Pathway to Maryland's Equitable Clean Energy Future](#)

whole home upgrades through a single agency. This model aims to simplify the process for homeowners, reduce barriers, and improve overall user experience. OSS creates one point of entry for all prospective customers through one application, provides a comprehensive home assessment, combines all available funding and services into one retrofit, and provides customer support throughout participation. Participants interact with one central organization to implement their project. The implementing organization helps the participant navigate through all resources, documentation, and funding.⁽²⁾

2. WHOLE HOME PLAN

Historically, DHCD operated its critical repair programs and the energy efficiency programs as stand-alone services, each with their own customers, processes, and program teams. Over the past three years, the Department has been working towards integration of the energy and repair programs to streamline the benefits that can be provided to all customers. The Department identified common barriers to program utilization and is working through a multi-step process to streamline application intake, processing, and deployment for an improved customer experience and greater impact statewide.

Internally, the Department began the integration process in 2021. As a first step, Housing and Building Energy Programs (HBEP) created streamlined processes for all single-family energy programs and MEEHA programs respectively. Each program aligned their intake, payment, and service delivery mechanisms, so that multiple energy programs could be accessed through the same application.

In 2023, DHCD started integrating its Special Loans Programs (SLP) and HBEP via cross-referrals. This included efforts to educate deferred energy clients about existing repair programs. For example, postcards were sent to deferrals and all completed rehab jobs were referred to the Energy team. Additionally, categorical eligibility was established across programs. The EmPOWER Single Family Program has made all Special Loans programs categorically eligible that align with its income limits. Now, only the Maryland Homeowner Assistance Fund is over-income.

In 2024, DHCD made progress on integration for the external customer experience:

- The Department created an umbrella division that encompasses all of the energy efficiency and critical repair programs, newly named Whole Home Energy & Repairs.
- A new landing page was created on the Department's website that guides the users through the One Stop Shop process.
- A new application has been developed that gathers information needed for all programs within Whole Home Energy & Repairs, to merge formerly siloed intake processes.
- The Whole Home Energy & Repairs program staff work together to guide the customer through all needed upgrades.
- A pilot was initiated to issue repair funds directly to local agencies to deploy the fund to deferred energy customers.

² [Funding Our Future: Creating a One-Stop Shop for Whole-Home Retrofits](#)

The new process for single family applicants now begins with a comprehensive application, through which the applicant can be qualified for all energy and repair programs. After applying to the Department, each consumer will begin with a comprehensive energy audit to gather all important information about the state of the home. Following the audit, the home may receive initial energy upgrades while identifying the scope of critical repairs that are needed. Critical repairs will be provided, followed by any remaining energy measures.

The Task Force discussed and advised DHCD on several challenges that are tied to the integration process:

- Is it more beneficial for all client information to be collected upfront or to start with limited intake information with follow ups for additional information requests? How do you balance the risks of overburdening applicants upfront versus customers dropping out when additional information is requested later on? Task Force members discussed various One Stop Shop models employed by private contractors and how they ease the information collection process to alleviate demands on customers.
- The multiple programs included in the OSS still have to maintain their differing compliance requirements from their respective funding sources. Therefore, the OSS does not necessarily reduce the complexity of dealing with multiple programs, it only shifts the complexity away from the customer onto the program administration performed by DHCD and its service providers. DHCD recognizes this as an important step to facilitate participation, but has felt the administrative impact of absorbing the complexity into its internal procedures. More documentation and verification is needed than previously. Service providers are noticing an impact from running various funding streams with different requirements in parallel, trying to keep track of and meeting differing requirements.

3. POINT OF CONTACT

Public Utilities Article 7-224 requires the Department to ensure, for any whole home retrofits associated with weatherization provided or developed under this plan, that there is a single point of contact for low-income residential households. The Department shall collaborate with the members of the Task Force and identify other interested parties to develop the plan.

The Task Force discussed this item and defined “single point of contact” as a “single way for contacting”. This means that the same way to make contact always reaches the agency. It also can include different modes of contacting through phone, email, and mail. This single way for contacting has the potential to also cover information about programs outside of DHCD, but that would require additional budgetary considerations.

The Task Force also discussed that some of this responsibility falls to network partners, but there are no requirements about timelines for reaching out to customers. Best practices are available that provide guidance on the timing and frequency of following up with customers who have become unresponsive. Enforcement or accountability measures for the network partners could be increased.

Currently, DHCD operates a single phone line, a single email inbox, and one form on the DHCD website where customers submit their questions or concerns. The submissions of that form, phone line, and email inbox are monitored by a DHCD team. DHCD is in the process of adding a text messaging option to the set of tools available to customers looking to contact DHCD. This year, DHCD expanded its staff to have a dedicated customer service team for all of DHCD's energy programs.

Task Force members discussed the extent to which these communication tools meet the needs of the most vulnerable households. In some cases, an on-site case manager is needed to walk families through the application process. For example, sometimes local health department staff support families applying for the joint DHCD-MDH lead abatement program. The Task Force discussed potentially having two separate processes, one contact process in which the single point of contact mechanisms suffice, and one where more involved support is needed. During the application process, a section can be added for applicants to indicate if they need more help with application support. It is important to consider how to ensure that only the applicants truly in need of additional support are the ones requesting assistance. If all applicants mark that they need additional application support, it would become cost-prohibitive for the Department to provide that assistance to anyone.

The Department of Human Services provides caseworker names and contact information when customers apply for their programs. DHS noted the importance of standardizing the approval process and providing clear, simple contact procedures. Case managers help applicants navigate across agencies to reduce handoffs and referrals. The Task Force discussed the potential of an independent case navigator to help across agencies.

4. LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS

In accordance with state law, the Department has its Energy application and marketing materials available in English and Spanish. State Government Article §10-1103⁽³⁾ requires the translation of vital documents ordinarily provided to the public into any language spoken by any limited English proficient population that constitutes 3% of the overall population within the geographic area served by the program. This applies to all publicly funded entities in the state. At the moment, the only foreign language meeting this requirement in Maryland is Spanish.

On the service implementation side, DHCD asks network partners what languages their staff speaks, specifically their energy auditors, as these are the primary contacts with customers. The Department can make assignments of network partners if they need services provided in a specific language. Within network partners, there is not a guarantee that subcontractors also speak the language. Further, there are concerns about what should be expected if network partners do not have any staff members who speak a language being requested by the customer.

Some network partners are using translation services on the tablets they use when they are collecting

³ [State Government Article §10-1103](#)

data during household audits.

On the application side, the State has a translation service via phone available for any program across the state.

A further consideration is that specific funding sources may have their own language access requirements. It will be useful to distinguish between the requirements by the state and those by the funding source.