

February 29, 2024

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman, Chair  
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 West  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: TESTIMONY ON SB 710 - Water Utilities Shutoff Protections - POSITION: FAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

The Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) thanks the Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 710 (SB 710) and respectfully requests a favorable report. With offices in every Maryland jurisdiction, DHS helps Marylanders in economic need. DHS supports SB 710 as this bill would protect thousands of individuals already eligible for and receiving benefits from various programs administered by our agency.

We are the largest social services agency in Maryland. We also determine Medicaid eligibility for individuals who are aged, blind or disabled enabling them to afford the medical care they need to survive and thrive. Additionally, the Social Services Administration within DHS leads the Office of Adult Services which is responsible for Adult Protective Services (APS) and the work to serve people aged 18 or over who lack the physical or mental capacity to provide for their daily needs. APS provides professional services to protect the health, safety, and welfare of adults.

Senate Bill 710 prevents water utility shutoff due to nonpayment if the customer or an individual residing in the home has a cognitive impairment that impacts their health, wellness, and safety. We administer the Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP), an emergency water assistance program to assist families experiencing hardship with their water bills. LIHWAP assists Maryland families who are behind on their drinking water and wastewater bills focusing on accounts that are 30 days or more past due. The LIHWAP program is set to sunset this year with receipt of applications ending March 1, 2024, thereby reinforcing the importance of SB 710.

Senate Bill 710 protects customers from water utility shutoff if they or someone living with them “are at least 65 years old and have an income at or below 50% of the area median income.” This legislation is an excellent companion to the benefits assistance we provide to the customers we serve.

Many of the Marylanders we serve often have to choose between paying for food, life-saving medication, or basic household necessities, including water utilities. Senate Bill 710 will help us make sure that seniors struggling with income, and people with disabilities or serious medical needs who fall behind on their utility payments for no fault of their own, are not penalized for experiencing poverty. We urge a favorable report on SB 710.



If you require additional information, please contact Rachel Sledge, Director of Government Affairs, at [rachel.sledge@maryland.gov](mailto:rachel.sledge@maryland.gov).

In service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rafael López', written in a cursive style.

Rafael López  
Secretary