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SB 710 Water Utilities Shutoff Protections
Senate Education, Energy, and Environment
FAVORABLE
February 29, 2024

Good afternoon, Chair Feldman and members of the Senate Education, Energy and the Environment. I am Tammy Bresnahan, Senior Director of Advocacy for AARP Maryland. AARP Maryland advocates on behalf of two million Marylanders age 50 and over. We support SB 710 and thank Senator Washington for sponsoring this important piece of legislation.

SB 710 establishes various restrictions relating to the authority of a “water utility” to shut off water or sewer service to a customer. A water utility may not shut off service for nonpayment of overdue bills for specified protected customers and individuals. The bill also generally prohibits a county or county tax collector from selling real property solely to enforce a lien imposed for unpaid water, sewer, or sanitary system charges, fees, or assessments. The bill makes other related and conforming changes.

AARP encourages policymakers to make sure there is adequate, potable, and affordable water for everyone.

Universal service in water includes extending service to those communities that currently lack or have inadequate water and sewer service. Infrastructure financing should consider affordability and the additional needs of households with lower incomes.

In addition, we encourage policymakers to create assistance programs to ensure that all households with low incomes can afford adequate water and sewer service. These programs should be fully funded. Customers should automatically be enrolled in water assistance programs when they enroll in other income-based financial assistance programs with similar qualifying criteria.

And finally, we encourage policymakers to:

- prohibit utilities from disconnecting or refusing to reconnect water service to households with low incomes when weather conditions or a public health emergency threaten health or safety, and
- provide financial assistance for plumbing repairs and efficiency measures for households with lower incomes.

For these reasons, AARP Maryland ask the committee for a favorable report on SB 710. If you have questions or need follow up, contact me at tbresnahan@aarp.org or call 410-302-8451.