



## MARYLAND LEGISLATIVE LATINO CAUCUS

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TO: Delegate Marc Korman, Chair  
Delegate Regina T. Boyce, Vice Chair  
Environment and Transportation Committee Members  
FROM: Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus  
DATE: 1/31/24  
RE: HB139 Landlord and Tenant - Office of Home Energy Programs - Financial Assistance

### **The MLLC supports HB139 Landlord and Tenant - Office of Home Energy Programs - Financial Assistance, 2024**

The MLLC is a bipartisan group of Senators and Delegates committed to supporting legislation that improves the lives of Latinos throughout our state. The MLLC is a crucial voice in the development of public policy that uplifts the Latino community and benefits the state of Maryland. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to express our support of HB139.

According to the Maryland Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP), some landlords have refused to accept payments, thus preventing households from accessing support services that OHEP offers. A 2022 survey by Indiana University's Energy Justice Lab showed that nearly 40 percent of Hispanic households and more than 26 percent of Black households were unable to pay their electricity bill.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, 29 percent of Hispanic households and 13 percent of Black households received a disconnection warning, and more than 18 percent of Hispanic households and 13 percent of Black households had their service disconnected.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, to prevent this from happening, families are forced to sacrifice other household essentials and comfort at home. A LendingTree analysis showed that 44 percent of Hispanic households reduced or skipped expenses to pay an energy bill, and 26 percent kept the house at a temperature that felt unsafe or unhealthy.<sup>3</sup>

To address these issues, the bill will require a landlord to accept financial assistance from the Office of Home Energy Programs for the utility costs that a tenant is expected to pay. The landlord must provide, under certain circumstances, the tenant with service documentation for the Office to determine assistance eligibility. Utility service includes fuel, gas, electric heat, water, or a similar service provided by a public service company that is regulated by the Public Service Commission. For each violation by a landlord, the Department of Human Services may impose an administrative penalty of \$500 for first offense, and \$1,000 for second or subsequent offense.

For these reasons, the Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus respectfully requests a favorable report on HB139.

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<sup>1</sup> [Unplugged: Why utilities are more likely to disconnect Black, Latino, and Indigenous households](#)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> [Nearly a Third of Americans Cut Back or Skip Expenses to Pay Utility Bills](#)