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January 26, 2024

To: The Honorable Marc Korman
Environment and Transportation Committee

From: Kira Wilpone-Welborn, Assistant Attorney General
Consumer Protection Division

Re: House Bill 139 – Landlord and Tenant - Office of Home Energy Programs - Financial Assistance (SUPPORT)

The Consumer Protection Division of the Office of the Attorney General (the “Division”) supports House Bill 139 sponsored by Delegate Lorig Charkoudian. House Bill 139 requires landlords to accept funds from the Office of Home Energy Programs for utility services that a tenant is obligated to pay. House Bill 139 further requires landlords to furnish documentation that is otherwise unavailable to tenants that establishes the tenant’s eligibility for assistance from the Office.

Landlord-tenant complaints are consistently among the top complaints received from consumers each year by the Consumer Protection Division. In 2020, the Maryland General Assembly enacted the HOME Act, which provided that a renter should not face discrimination in their access or maintenance of their housing due to their source of income, including “any government or private assistance, grant, loan, or rental assistance program.” See State Government Article § 20-701(J)(2)(II). Notwithstanding the HOME Act, the Division has received complaints from consumers, advocates, and rental assistance program administrators that many Maryland landlords refuse to provide the information necessary for tenants to complete applications for financial assistance or refuse to accept funds awarded to eligible renters. Allowing Maryland landlords to reject funds or refuse to provide relevant documentation to assist renters in obtaining financial assistance violates, at the very least, the spirit of the HOME Act. A favorable vote on House Bill 139 would further underscore and solidify the

General Assembly's intent to prevent and denounce the discrimination renters face when their finances come directly from the government.

For these reasons, the Division requests the Environment and Transportation Committee issue a favorable report on House Bill 139.

cc: The Honorable Lorig Charkoudian
Members, Environment and Transportation Committee