

LORIG CHARKOUDIAN
Legislative District 20
Montgomery County

Economic Matters Committee

Subcommittees

Public Utilities

Chair, Unemployment Insurance



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB 139- LANDLORD AND TENANT-OFFICE OF HOME ENERGY PROGRAMS- FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

TESTIMONY OF DELEGATE LORIG CHARKOUDIAN

JANUARY 30, 2023

Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

The Maryland Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP) provides essential support for energy burdened, low-income households to pay their utility bills and catch up on past due utility bills. They are also able to provide protection from utility turn-offs and access to weatherization and energy efficiency upgrades for households who may not otherwise have access to these services.

Households whose utility payments are included in their rent qualify for certain OHEP programs. In order for the support grants to be dispersed to qualified households in an accurate manner, OHEP needs to see the utility bill. Generally, the landlord has to accept the payment on behalf of the tenant and then credit the dispersed amount to the individual's rent. Alternatively, OHEP can distribute the funds to the tenant directly, if they can see the bill.

In my work in the community, I engage with many local nonprofit organizations who engage with OHEP and assist families to sign up for their programs. The feedback from these organizations is that most landlords are engaging with OHEP to the benefit of their tenants. However, some landlords are choosing not to accept the payments or tenant/landlord relationships are such that tenants don't feel comfortable requesting the needed information.

The bill before you requires that landlords accept these funds and includes penalties. After conversations with DHS and some advocates, we have identified a preferable solution. I have requested the below amendment which would strike the bill and instead add electric and gas utilities to the section of the Real Property Article that currently requires landlords to provide a copy of the bill to tenants who pay for said utility through their landlord. I believe this will add transparency for all tenants and it will allow tenants who would otherwise be concerned about engaging with the landlord an opportunity to have their bill and access benefits.

I respectfully request a favorable report on HB 139.

Delete the text of the bill and replace it with the following additions to MD Code, Real Property, § 8-205.1:

Utility service provider defined

(a) In this section, “utility service provider” means a public service company or a unit of State or local government that provides water, ~~or~~ sewer, **gas, or electric** utility services.

Scope of section

~~(b)(1) This section applies only to a landlord of a building that contains one or two residential dwelling units.~~

(2) This section does not apply to a landlord that requires a tenant, under an oral or written lease, to pay water, ~~or~~ sewer, **gas or electric** bills directly to the utility service provider.

Payments to landlord; copy of bill to tenant

(c) A landlord that requires a tenant to make payments for water, ~~or~~ sewer, **gas or electric** utility services to the landlord shall:

(1) Use a written lease that provides notice that the tenant is responsible for making payments for water or sewer utility services to the landlord; and

(2) Provide a copy of the water, ~~or~~ sewer, **gas or electric** bill to the tenant.