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HB 139 – Landlord and Tenant – Office of Home Energy Programs – Financial Assistance

**Hearing before the House Environment and Transportation Committee,
January 30, 2024**

Position: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS (FWA)

Public Justice Center (PJC) is a nonprofit public interest law firm that assists over 800 renters and their families each year. We stand with tenants to protect and expand their rights to safe, habitable, affordable, and non-discriminatory housing. PJC seeks the Committee’s Favorable report on HB 139 with amendments offered by the sponsor.

HB 139 with the proposed sponsor amendments would require that landlords provide tenants with clear information in their leases and copies of any relevant utility bills that must be paid to the landlord so that tenants can more readily access utility assistance programs. In our experience, many landlords cooperate with utility assistance programs for our tenant-clients, but some do not. Some landlords don’t respond to requests for documentation. Others – to facilitate a quicker eviction for a family they deem undesirable – refuse to provide tenants with the necessary documentation to complete the application for assistance including utility bills, rent ledgers, or even a copy of the lease.

Tenants face eviction and the loss of utility services for numerous reasons include the significant spike in [rent inflation in the aftermath of the pandemic – 19% in the Baltimore metro region](#) in 2021 and 2022. [Approximately 56% of families are unable to cover a \\$1,000 emergency.](#) Families are closer now to the edge of homelessness than ever such that one small financial setback can push them over the cliff of utility shutoff and eviction.

HB 139 will provide families a fair and reasonable opportunity to obtain utility assistance from OHEP and ensure that no family is excluded from emergency assistance.

Public Justice Center asks that the Committee **issue a report of Favorable With Sponsor Amendments on HB 139**. If you have any questions, please contact C. Matthew Hill hillm@publicjustice.org, (410) 625-9409 Ext. 229.