



TESTIMONY FOR SB0710 WATER UTILITIES SHUTOFF PROTECTIONS

Bill Sponsor: Senator Washington

Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Cecilia Plante, co-chair

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of SB0710 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

It has sadly become more common for water utility companies in Maryland to shut off water to a residence because of unpaid water bills. In some cases, the property is sold in a tax sale for unpaid water bills.

Our members understand and appreciate that the water utilities are not offering a free service and that they have expenses that must be paid for. However, it is completely unacceptable to sell someone's house out from under them because they have not paid their water bills. Nonpayment is generally due to the individual having extenuating circumstances and some compassion seems to be in order.

This bill, if enacted, would prohibit water utilities from selling property due to unpaid water bills. It would also prohibit them from shutting off the water in residences where the individual has a significant medical condition that would worsen due to the shutoff; or if the individual is over 65 and their income is less than 50% of the median income in the area; or if the individual has a physical, cognitive, or medical impairment.

Our members think this shows compassion to people who already have difficulties but it does not preclude the utilities from temporarily shutting off water for reasons of health or safety or in a state or national emergency.

We support this bill and recommend a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.