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March 16, 2020

To: The Honorable Dereck E. Davis
Chair, Economic Matters Committee

From: Karen S. Straughn
Consumer Protection Division

Re: Senate Bill 628 – Utilities – Surviving Spouse of Account Holder – Protections
(SUPPORT)

The Consumer Protection Division of the Office of the Attorney General submits the following written testimony in support of Senate Bill 628 submitted by Senator Cheryl C. Kagan. This bill would require a utility to treat a surviving spouse as a joint holder of the account, or as an account holder, upon presentation of the account holder's death certificate and a marriage certificate.

Utilities are routinely placed in the name of one spouse only. Presently, when that individual passes away, it may be difficult for the remaining spouse to establish control of the account that they shared. This bill would ensure that these difficulties are easily overcome and a surviving spouse has the ability to maintain their electrical or gas coverage without having to arrange for a new account and/or be subject to additional fees or charges. By presenting the account holder's death certificate, as well as a marriage certificate, the utility would be required to extend the account for at least 6 months, transfer the account to the surviving spouse or close the account if requested by the surviving spouse, all without imposing any additional fees. In addition, the utility would preserve its rights to impose fees or terminate the account if payments were not made on the account as required. A surviving spouse should not be treated as a new customer and be subject to additional fees, and this bill would preserve those rights without diminishing any rights of the utility.

For these reasons, we ask that the Economic Matters Committee return a favorable report on this bill.

cc: The Honorable Cheryl C. Kagan
Members, Economic Matters Committee

