

HB889

FAVORABLE TESTIMONY

ECONOMIC MATTERS SPONSOR: Carey
ECM HEARING: MARCH 3, 2022

FROM: ENERGY ADVOCATES COALITION, L. PELTIER

SILVER LIGHTS ENERGY SAVERS INBOUND TELEPHONE SERVICE

Under the *Silver Energy Savers Program* brand name, this important bill would fund four people to consistently answer the telephone for seniors 60+ and to help apply and help manage energy assistance applications.

I volunteer weekly as energy counselor at GEDCO CARES community center in Baltimore City. CARES helps clients navigate their OHEP energy assistance application while the state offices are closed, apply for Fuel Fund, if needed, and review third-party supplier issues.

The need for *Silver Energy Savers Program* to be codified in statute is to ensure that Maryland will consistency in the future help seniors apply for their energy assistance applications with two functions that always go together:

1. Pick up the phone,
2. With the intent to help the inbound caller answer questions, and help them apply for energy assistance.

Please find Ms. Brown, a recent CARES client's quote, pulled from her letter. The original hand-written letter is included and it's typed up so that you can read it.

What special service did CARES provide that Ms. Brown mentions after she had flamed out applying online?

We picked up the phone with the intention of helping the caller.

I listened and assured her she would not be “tefloned” to another agency or place. She’d been chasing her tail for 2 weeks and was pretty upset because she had an impending BGE turn-off date. Thank heavens she had called BGE and received a 7-day extension.

“To whom it may concern: Hello, my name is Donna Brown. I’m writing this letter on behalf of people such as myself finding I’d really difficult for me to go online and fill out application to get help with my BGE assistance...”

I want you all to know how much it really meant to me to know that someone took the time and listened to my needs because them last 2 weeks have been nothing but hell for me not knowing if my BGE will be turned off.”

What’s driving this stress? Maryland’s heavy reliance on the internet for benefit education, information, customer service, resolutions and applications. While it may help certain targets, benefits for senior constituents cannot be 100% addressed online. What ends up happening is that issues magnify and then move into the crisis stage. Like an impending BGE turn-off notice. Then folks start dialing and looking for anyone that picks up a phone. Often they call wrong place, and just get another list of numbers and places to visit.

HB998, the Silver Energy Savers Program inbound call service, ensures Maryland’s low-income seniors can safely apply over-the-phone for OHEP energy assistance to keep their heat and lights on.

Below are typed up notes, slightly edited, from Ms. Donna Brown's hand-written letter regarding her phone experience at GEDCO CARES.

Ms. Brown called into GEDCO CARES on February 1, 2022. Ms. Brown was so upset, that the lady who answered the call wasn't sure what type of help Ms. Brown needed, but Ms. Brown mentioned "BGE."

As part of their community services, CARES volunteer energy counselors offer in-person and telephonic help Monday through Friday. Laurel Peltier was the energy counselor volunteer that day.

February 7, 2022
(postmark on envelope)

To whom it may concern:

Hello, my name is Donna Brown. I'm writing this letter on behalf of people such as myself finding I'd really difficult for me to go online and fill out application to get help with my BGE assistance.

So I went on foot to several churches to get help with my BGE [bill]. I was not allowed in the building due to COVID-19 restrictions so I was handed a pamphlet with instructions to again go online and several numbers to call for help. Then I called one of the numbers at a place called CARES. I was transferred to a lady named Ms. Laurel. So I explain to her what my needs were, I shared with her that I needed help filinglilling out my energy assistance.

So she asked had I already filled out an application. I told her "yes," but I don't know who to send it to, or if I even filled it out correctly.

So Ms. Laurel said to me, "Don't worry, I can help you to make sure it's done correctly.

When I say this was a sign of relief to know that there's someone out here to help people like myself not knowing what to do over the phone, step-by-step, it was a weight lifted off my shoulders.

Not to mention it had taken me 2 weeks seeking information on how to get help, Ms. Laurel was an angel sent not only did she help me complete my application over the phone, she gave me a follow-up call the next day to reassure me that all my information was sent to the right people.

I truly pray for more people like Ms. Laurel in the world that really CARE about people and I can tell she loves what she does when it comes to helping people.

I want you all to know how much it really meant to me to know that someone took the time and listened to my needs because them last 2 weeks have been nothing but hell for me not knowing if my BGE will be turned off.

*So with that being said I really appreciate her service that she provided me. Thanks.
(Then she wrote something to Laurel, didn't type it up)*

Yours truly,
Ms Donna Brown
8 Tadmire Ct Apt 104
Parkville, MD 21234

2/17/22

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Donna Brown I'm writing
this letter on the behalf
of people such as myself
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for me to go online and fill
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to get help with my BGE I
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I was handed a pamphlet with
instruction to again go online
and several numbers to call for
help then I call one of the numbers
a place call CARE I was transfer to
a lady name Ms. Laurel. So I explain
to her what my needs where I
Share with her that I needed help

over →

feeling out my Energy as strange
 so she ask if I feel out my
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Danny called BGE - got extension
over

Ms Browns letter Feb 2022

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how much it really meant to me
to know someone took out time
and listen to my needs because
them last 2 weeks been nothing
but hell for me not knowing if
my B&E will be turn off so
with that being said I really
appreciate her service that
she provided me thanks !! @
Mrs. Laurel you ROCK !! @
Have a Blessed Day

Yours truly
Ms. Jenn Brown
cell: 443-529-2901

