



Marjorie Cook Foundation
Domestic Violence Legal Clinic

2201 Argonne Drive • Baltimore, Maryland 21218 • 410-554-8463 • dlennig@hruthmd.org

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 630

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DOROTHY J. LENNIG, LEGAL CLINIC DIRECTOR

The House of Ruth Maryland is a non-profit organization providing shelter, counseling, and legal services to victims of domestic violence throughout the State of Maryland. House of Ruth has offices in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Prince George's County, and Montgomery County. House Bill 630 would require utility companies to release a primary or secondary account holder who is the victim of domestic violence from a contract held with the utility. **We urge the House Economic Matters Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 630.**

House Bill 630 would enable victims of domestic violence to remove themselves from shared utilities accounts, thereby removing a barrier to leaving the relationship and ending the abuse. When victims of domestic violence flee from their abusers, they face a myriad of difficulties. They face safety issues, as the time of separation can often be the most dangerous time for domestic violence victims. They face housing issues, as it is often hard to find new housing quickly. They also face financial issues, including having enough money for a security deposit, money for the move, and buying new furniture for their new residence. One oft-overlooked issue is establishing utility accounts in their own name. HB 630 would reduce one of the obstacles to leaving an abusive relationship by requiring utility companies to release an account holder who is a domestic violence victim from a utility contract.

HB 630 requires the victim to provide an attestation in writing as a victim of domestic violence. The written attestation must be by either law enforcement, a domestic violence, sexual assault, or human trafficking program, or a religious or medical professional. This requirement is similar to that of the Address Confidentiality Program. HB 630 will add an important element to the array of tools available to survivors of domestic violence to create independent, violence-free lives.

The House of Ruth urges a favorable report on House Bill 630.