

**House Bill 630- Public Utilities - Primary and Secondary Account Holders - Domestic Violence Protections**

Baltimore Gas and Electric Company (BGE) supports the goals of House *Bill 630 - Public Utilities - Primary and Secondary Account Holders - Domestic Violence Protections*, a bill that requires the utility companies to release a victim of domestic violence from a utility contract.

BGE acknowledges the pernicious effects of domestic violence and the challenges that survivors face in extricating themselves from abusive homes. We salute the sponsor for proposing measures that will reduce the financial and logistical burdens that survivors face in escaping their abusers.

BGE, however, has concerns that there are no safeguards in the legislation. We respectfully ask that the legislation be amended to make clear that any existing account balance, and account balance going forward is assigned to and becomes the responsibility of the remaining account holder. BGE believes it is necessary to avoid creating incentives for fraud by debtors to avoid paying past due amounts.

In addition, the risk of such unscrupulous conduct is heightened because the proof required under the bill is broadly defined and may be fulfilled by unofficial sources. The bill does not require that the alleged abuser be charged with a crime, or that the proof of the account holder's circumstances come from government agencies. The Committee may want to consider limiting the attestation required in the bill to law enforcement, state or federal agencies, or other official sources accordingly.

BGE commends the sponsor and members of the General Assembly for considering the circumstances of domestic violence victims and working to help them escape to safety and security. As one of Maryland's largest utilities and largest employers, we are committed to being a part of that conversation and look forward to working with you.

We have shared with our concerns the bill sponsor and we look forward to continuing conversations with the sponsor on this legislation.