
BILL NO: House Bill 630
TITLE: Public Utilities - Primary and Secondary Account Holders - Domestic Violence Protections
COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and the Environment
HEARING DATE: March 28, 2023
POSITION: **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS**

House Bill 630 would provide an avenue for a survivor of domestic violence (also called intimate partner violence) to remove their name from a utility account, whether they are the primary or the secondary account holder. The Women's Law Center supports this bill as an important way for a survivor to be able to move forward in their life. We suggest a friendly amendment to correct a drafting error.

People who are experiencing domestic violence often cannot leave their abuser because of the intertwining, often financially, of their lives with their abuser. Things such as sharing a utility account, having a telephone plan together and the like are reasons that people cannot leave the relationship or home where the abuse is occurring. House Bill 630 would be a valuable change in our laws for survivors to be able to move out and move forward in their lives, helping to sever the ties to their abuser.

Under HB 630, upon adequate proof, as described in the bill, that the person is survivor of domestic violence, they would be able to be removed from the utility bill. The utility company, as defined in the bill, would not be able to require additional information other than what is in the bill. It would also not be able to make removal contingent on paying any arrearages or on obtaining permission from the other account holder. Victims may not even have known their names were on those accounts at all and there may be money owed. It is imperative that the abuser not be alerted that any changes have been to an account since that could trigger their knowledge that their victim is planning to leave.

Also, under HB 630 the documentation required for eligibility is comparable to what is required to enroll in our state's Address Confidentiality Program. It is not based purely on self-attestation. Eligibility for the Address Confidentiality Program is contingent upon the relocation of a victim to a new address compounding the importance of a victim's ability to establish themselves separately from their abuser.

We ask the Committee to adopt an amendment as follows:

“on page 3, line 24, strike “PEACE” and substitute “PROTECTIVE”

For all the foregoing reasons the Women's Law Center of Maryland, Inc. urges a favorable report on House Bill 630 with amendment.

The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a private, non-profit, legal services organization that serves as a leading voice for justice and fairness for women. It advocates for the rights of women through legal assistance to individuals and strategic initiatives to achieve systemic change, working to ensure physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy for women in Maryland.