



**TESTIMONY FOR SB0171
LANDLORD AND TENANT – OFFICE OF HOME ENERGY PROGRAMS – FINANCIAL
ASSISTANCE**

Bill Sponsor: Senator Augustine

Committee: Judicial Proceedings

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Cecilia Plante, co-chair

Position: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

I am submitting this testimony in favor of SB0171 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

Utilities, such as electricity, gas, heat, and water make up a significant portion of rent for most tenants. Several years ago, the General Assembly put in place a mechanism to help low-income renters with utility costs by making energy assistance available through the Electricity Universal Service Program (EUSP). However, not all landlords are willing to participate in the program, so the low-income renters that should be getting relief are instead forced to pay much more of their wages for utilities.

This legislation, if enacted, would require landlords to accept the funds from the EUSP program and to give those tenants who qualify the appropriate credit for their utilities. Failure of the landlord to provide their tenants with the appropriate paperwork for the EUSP program would result in an administrative penalty of \$500 and up to \$1,000 for subsequent offenses.

Our members are not certain how this new provision would be audited to ensure compliance. Certainly, landlords know what residents would qualify based on the information the renter has to provide to them. Perhaps a report that each landlord would provide monthly with the names of all tenants who qualify as low income. This report could be matched against records of all individuals in the EUSP program. **WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE SOME KIND OF MECHANISM TO AUDIT THE EUSP PROGRAM RECORDS WITH THE LOW-INCOME RESIDENTS IN THE STATE.**

We support this bill and recommend a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** report in committee.