

Senate Bill 171
Landlord and Tenant – Office of Home Energy Programs – Financial Assistance
Judicial Proceedings Committee
January 30, 2024
Support

Catholic Charities of Baltimore supports SB 171, which requires landlords to accept financial assistance from the Office of Home Energy Programs for tenant utility costs and provide tenants with necessary utility service documentation to determine eligibility for assistance or face penalties.

Inspired by the Gospel to love, serve and teach, Catholic Charities provides care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. For 100 years, Catholic Charities has accompanied Marylanders as they age with dignity, heal from trauma and addiction, achieve economic independence, prepare for educational success and support the integration of our new neighbors into our communities.

As one of the largest human service providers in Maryland, we work every day with low-income individuals and see firsthand how they struggle to make ends meet. In particular, at Sarah's House, we serve anyone in need of safe, emergency shelter, daily meals, supportive housing, and rapid re-housing services for families experiencing homelessness in Anne Arundel County. High utility costs are just one of many barriers that can negatively impact an individual's ability to maintain stable housing.

Most of the people we move into Rapid Re-Housing come to us from the shelter, where they work on paying down their bills to be able to move into housing. Last year, we served 21 families in our Rapid Re-Housing Program. Out of those 21 families, 16 had outstanding BGE bills that they needed to pay prior to moving into their new units. We know firsthand that utility assistance is vitally important in assisting low-income individuals meet their basic housing needs.

Embracing SB 171 is crucial for securing a stable housing future for individuals in need. This vital legislation guarantees that those working towards housing stability can confidently access the utility assistance they are eligible for. By compelling landlords to accept financial aid from the Office of Home Energy Programs, SB 171 effectively eliminates the worrisome possibility that landlords may reject the utility assistance previously approved for these individuals.

On behalf of the individuals and families we work with, Catholic Charities of Baltimore appreciates your consideration, and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for SB 171.

Submitted By: Madelin Martinez, Assistant Director of Advocacy

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