



**TESTIMONY**  
**Maryland General Assembly**  
**Environment and Transportation Committee**  
**In Favor of HB220 – Environment – Water – Individual Unit Meters**

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Good afternoon, Chairman Korman, Vice Chair Guyton, and Committee members. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today. My name is Emilee Towey and I am speaking on behalf of the Renters Alliance as one of our outreach coordinators. The Renters Alliance is Maryland's first and only regional nonprofit dedicated exclusively to renter outreach, education, organizing, and advocacy. Since our founding in 2010, the Renters Alliance has been an unwavering advocate for expanding and strengthening renter protections, which distinctly aligns with the goals of HB220 regarding fair practices in metering and billing of water utilities in apartment buildings.

The Renters Alliance is in strong support of HB220, which will fill an existing gap in regulation and oversight of utility service delivery and billing in multifamily properties. Unlike the regulation required by Maryland law of individual electricity meters for individual rental units, we are not aware of any current laws that regulate private, individual water meters installed in apartment buildings. For tenants at The Grand in North Bethesda, this legal loophole led to a lot of confusion and frustration over their water bills.

When we started receiving calls from the Grand tenants' association and individual residents, we were astonished to hear about the high services charges being added on to their water bills, and the lack of any oversight - beyond the private company contracted by the landlord - regarding the maintenance of the meters and the accuracy of the readings and associated billing.<sup>1</sup>

We are grateful to Delegate Charkoudian for drafting and introducing HB220 to put a stop to these unfair practices that exploit tenants' need for this most basic of services. Many residents at the Grand are seniors on a fixed income who can become completely destabilized by a landlord who decides to take advantage of there being no existing cap on service charges. The \$1 limit on services charges in HB220 would bring water billing in line with other utility regulation and help prevent the destabilization that comes with unexpected, exorbitant bills.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Grand Apartments - Review of Water Billing Practices*. Montgomery County Office of Consumer Protection, May 5, 2025

We also appreciate the provisions in the bill ensuring proper maintenance of individual, private water meters, and transparency for tenants around how the meters are functioning and whether leaks are detected.

Finally, it is worth noting that HB220 would codify the prohibition of a landlord treating unpaid or disputed water bills as rent for purposes of a Failure to Pay Rent action.

This bill will offer a crucial fix for an existing gap in utility regulation for renters, by applying the fair, common-sense regulation that is required of most utilities to individual, private water meters installed by landlords. We strongly urge a favorable report. Thank you for your time.