



L.E.G. Alert

Legislative Education Group (L.E.G.)

SERVING MARYLAND'S VULNERABLE POPULATIONS FOR OVER 30 YEARS

March 2009

SAFE FROM DANGER

Dear L.E.G. Member:

We write asking you to **support with amendments** legislation that would prohibit utilities from shutting off service because of non-payment during times of extreme heat and cold. The proposal is **HB 453: Public Service Companies -- Termination of Electric and Gas Service -- Extreme Temperatures.**

Background:

- Currently, under the Public Service Commission regulations, utility companies cannot shut off service for non-payment on a day when the forecasted high temperature is 32 degrees or below.
- The current regulation restricting termination only protects citizens for a 24-hour period during cold weather and does *not* protect them if the forecasted high is above 32 degrees but the temperature drops below freezing during the day or at night.
- The current regulation does *not* protect families at all during very hot weather.
- Unfortunately, during times of extreme cold and heat, Marylanders who are unable to pay their bills may lose service forcing them to live in very dangerous and potentially deadly living conditions.

HB 453 Would:

- Put in statute the current regulation restricting shut-offs when temperatures are extremely cold.
- Provide greater protection to Marylanders than currently exists as it prohibits service terminations during times of extreme heat (*a forecasted heat index of 95 degrees or higher*), not just extreme cold.

Amendments Are Needed To:

- Provide protection for a 72-hour period, not just one day.
- Provide protection if the forecasted temperature is 32 degrees or below at any time of the day, not just if the forecasted high is 32 degrees or below. (*Protects if temperature drops to teens or single-digits at night*).
- Allow the Public Service Commission to adopt regulations that provide more protection, but must meet the minimum levels of statutory protection from shut-offs during extremely cold and hot weather which are outlined in the bill.

Why Support HB 453 with Amendments?

- HB 453 would help keep vulnerable Marylanders healthy and safe during extreme weather conditions.
- Especially now with home energy costs rising and many Marylanders struggling to pay bills, the State's commitment to the health and safety of its citizens must be strengthened.

What YOU can do to HELP...Write or Send an Email...

Write or email a brief note to the legislator from your jurisdiction on the House Committee on Economic Matters (*see list with e-mails at end of this alert*). This needs immediate action. If your legislator does not serve on the Economic Matters Committee, please send a note to the Chairperson:

The Honorable Dereck E. Davis
Chair, House Economic Matters Committee
dereck.davis@house.state.md.us

To find who your legislators, go to <http://mlis.state.md.us/> and click "Find" a legislator.

In addition, Delegate Keith Haynes, the sponsor of HB 453, has requested that those who write or email regarding HB 453 to PLEASE cc him.

Delegate Keith Haynes
House Office Building – Room 424
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401
410.841.3801 / keith.haynes@house.state.md.us

We have a timely opportunity to support this legislation to ensure that Maryland citizens who are unable to pay their home energy bills are not put at greater risk of serious illness or death when temperatures reach dangerous levels. Your action is particularly important to the elderly, young children, and those who suffer from chronic health conditions because they are more vulnerable during times of extreme heat or cold.

Thank you for your willingness to speak out in support of this very important legislation to prohibit utility companies from terminating electric and gas service when temperatures are extreme. Because a family is struggling to pay the bills, they should not be placed in dangerous or potentially deadly living conditions. All Marylanders should be safe during extreme weather conditions.

A "Sample Alert Letter" is enclosed on the following page.

Sincerely,



Sr. Joan Marie Stief, OSB
L.E.G. Coordinator
Parish Social Ministry

"The Gospel calls Christians to put the needs of the poor first. A common moral test of a society is how it treats its most vulnerable people. Those with the greatest need require the greatest response.

Synopsis of Principles of Catholic Social Teaching in "Being Neighbor"
Catholic Campaign for Human Development/U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

SAMPLE "ALERT" LETTER

Delegate's Name
House Office Building, Room _____
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SUPPORT of HB 453 with Amendments: Public Service Companies --Termination of Electric and Gas Service -- Extreme Temperatures.

Dear Delegate _____ OR Chairman Dereck E. Davis:

As a Maryland resident who cares about the health and safety of Marylanders, I support HB 453 with Amendments.

With home energy costs rising and more Marylanders struggling to pay their bills, more people are at risk of having their gas and electric service shut-off because on non-payment. If service is shut-off during times of extreme heat or cold, individuals will be forced to endure very dangerous and potentially deadly living conditions. Older adults, young children and those with chronic health conditions are particularly vulnerable to heat and cold related illnesses such as heat exhaustion, heat stroke, and hypothermia.

I hope the General Assembly will establish a minimum level of protection to keep Marylanders safe during extreme weather conditions — when the forecasted heat index is 95 degrees or above and when the forecasted temperature is 32 degrees or below. This bill should be amended to provide reprieve for 72 hours, not just 24, to prohibit termination if the forecasted temperature at any time during the day, not the forecasted high, is 32 degrees or below, and to allow the Public Service Commission to provide greater, but not less, protection in regulations.

HB 453 will protect vulnerable Marylanders who are unable to pay their utility bills. No Marylander should be shut-off and put at risk of serious illness or death because they cannot afford their home energy bill. I hope the Committee will vote in favor of this bill before a tragedy occurs. HB 453 will protect the health and safety of the citizens of Maryland during extreme weather conditions.

I urge you to vote **FOR HB 453 with Amendments**

Thank you for considering my views.

Sincerely,

Your Name
Your Address

SAMPLE "ALERT" LETTER

House Economic Matters Committee

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