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BILL NO.: **House Bill 520**
Electric Companies—Contact Voltage—Surveys
and Mitigation

COMMITTEE: **Economic Matters**

HEARING DATE: **February 23, 2012**

SPONSOR: **Delegates Nathan-Pulliam et al.**

POSITION: **Informational**

In October 2011, the Public Service Commission (PSC) adopted regulations which require electric companies to establish voltage survey plans, conduct contact voltage surveys, and use best efforts to mitigate any contact voltage discovered. (COMAR 20.50.11). The regulations were adopted in response to public safety concerns that arose when a young woman, Deanna Camille Green, was electrocuted after touching a fence in a park in Baltimore City. Those regulations require electric companies to perform contact voltage surveys in contact voltage risk zones (CVRZs) of : (1) all publicly accessible electric distribution plant; (2) electric company-owned or -maintained streetlights; (3) with consent, municipal-owned or governmental-owned streetlights and traffic signals that are publicly accessible and capable of conducting electricity; and (4)

all objects and surfaces that are publicly accessible in public parks and playgrounds that are capable of conducting electricity. The PSC regulations do not require testing of *all* publicly accessible, non-utility conductive facilities. House Bill 520 would impose broader survey and testing requirements than provided for by the recently adopted regulations.

If passed, House Bill 520 would require more widespread voltage testing to include non-utility, publicly accessible, privately owned conductive facilities. Under the Bill, it would be the obligation of the electric utility to make the area safe and to make repairs in the case of utility owned or maintained facilities. In the case of stray voltage being detected on publicly accessible but privately owned property or facilities, the utility must make best efforts to make the area safe and notify the facility owner or customer of the need to make repairs. The increased efforts to identify contact voltage, make areas safe, notify owners of the dangers and, where necessary, to make repairs will increase the costs to the utilities.

The Department of Legislative Services notes that the Public Service Commission estimates the total cost for implementation of the existing contact voltage regulations would be less than \$8 million, although the cost of the additional requirements of this bill are not known. It is anticipated that the utilities will include these costs as part of their expenses when they file cases at the PSC for rate increases. Those costs would be examined by the Commission for reasonableness and prudence. To the extent the PSC approves inclusion of the expenses in rates the increase might be reflected in slightly increased rates to customers, all else being equal.