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BILL NO.: House Bill 0139 – Landlord and Tenant – Office of Home Energy Programs – Financial Assistance

COMMITTEE: Environment and Transportation Committee

HEARING DATE: January 30, 2024

SPONSOR: Delegate Charkoudian

POSITION: Favorable

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The Office of People’s Counsel (“OPC”) supports House Bill 139 because it helps enable critical energy assistance to reach more eligible residential customers in the State.

The Office of Home Energy Programs provides financial assistance to low-income households in the State to make their energy costs more affordable through several grant programs, including the Electric Universal Service Program and the Maryland Energy Assistance Program. This critical assistance helps to reduce the energy burden for those who access it, but estimates are that only a small fraction—around 25 percent—of eligible households currently do.

One barrier for low-income customers who rent, rather than own, and pay for utility services through their landlord, rather than paying the utility directly, is the requirement to submit with their application a copy of their utility bill. These tenants must rely on their landlords to provide this documentation, but under current law, landlords are not required to provide it.

With sponsor amendments we understand are forthcoming, HB 139 provides a simple fix by providing that a landlord that requires a tenant to make payments for utility services to the landlord must provide a copy of the utility bill to the tenant. By removing this barrier, HB 139 has the potential to increase EUSP participation and bring down energy burdens for more low-income households in our State. At the same time, it will increase the transparency of utility billing for all qualifying tenants.

**Recommendation:** OPC requests a favorable Committee report on HB 139, as amended by the Sponsor.