

Energy and Technology Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5441

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING UTILITY SHUTOFFS FOR CERTAIN CUSTOMERS.

Vote Date: 3/21/2024

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/14/2024

File No.:

***Disclaimer:** The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

SPONSORS OF BILL: N/A

REASONS FOR BILL:

Although current statutes protect those who are in hardship cases where a customer does not have the means to pay their utility bills, many argue that such protections are ultimately hurting the populace, as all customers have to pay higher rates to balance these unpaid bills from hardship customers. This bill would implement language that would substitute subsection (b) of section 16-262c of the Conn. Gen. Statutes to reconsider the terms of which hardship cases are given protections for utility shutoffs, along with narrowing the definition of hardship cases themselves. Requirements of establishing a timeline for termination notices of hardship customers would be instated.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Claire E. Coleman, Consumer Counsel H.B. 5441 An Act Concerning Utility Shutoffs for Certain Customer

The Office of Consumer Counsel ("OCC") supports the Committee's efforts to address collection methods to manage and reduce arrearages associated with medically protected customers. However, the agency is concerned that the bill, as proposed, may not strike the appropriate balance between Connecticut's goal of collecting payments from past due customers and protecting customers from the potentially lethal consequences of disconnections for customers dependent on utility service for health and safety.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

JESSICA CAIN, VP CUSTOMER OPERATIONS AND ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS AT EVERSOURCE, H.B. NO. 5441 AN ACT CONCERNING UTILITY SHUTOFFS FOR CERTAIN CUSTOMERS

TODAY, ALL CUSTOMERS ARE PAYING THE BILLS OF SOME WHO CAN AFFORD TO PAY BUT DO NOT PAY. THE CHANGES IN THIS BILL ARE IMPORTANT BECAUSE THEY ADDRESS THE INEQUITY AND UNFAIRNESS IN THAT.

THIS BILL ADDRESSES CHANGES TO STATUTES CONCERNING SHUT OFF PROTECTIONS FOR CUSTOMERS WITHOUT A MEANS TEST OR FINANCIAL HARDSHIP.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

John Erlingheuser, Senior Director of Advocacy, AARP Connecticut
Raised H.B. No. 5441 AN ACT CONCERNING UTILITY SHUTOFFS FOR CERTAIN CUSTOMERS.

The AARP believes that H.B. No. 5441 would erode an important consumer protection regarding utilities' shutoffs for customers with medical situations. In turn, this would harm older adults with medical conditions and jeopardize public safety. They expressed that to be protected from shut-off, a customer would need to demonstrate not only that they lacked financial resources but also would need to be identified as a hardship case, which is a more stringent requirement.

Tom Swan, Executive Director of the Connecticut Citizen Action Group
H.B. 5441 AN ACT CONCERNING UTILITY SHUTOFFS FOR CERTAIN CUSTOMERS

CCAG strongly opposes H.B. 5441 AN ACT CONCERNING UTILITY SHUTOFFS FOR CERTAIN CUSTOMERS. CCAG believes the proposal goes too far and will put peoples' lives at risk. Additional study needs to be done on the people medically protected customers, including data matches with DSS.

The following are also in opposition of **H.B. 5541 AN ACT CONCERNING SHUTOFFS FOR CERTAIN CUSTOMERS:**

Podolsky, Raphael, Connecticut Legal Services, Inc.
Roswig, Bonnie, Center for Children's Advocacy
Toubman, Sheldon, Disability Rights CT
Turaj, Mike, Public Affairs Associate, Operation Fuel
James, Hannah, Yale School of Public Health
Rosenberg, Julia, Pediatrician
Dillon, Matthews, Greater Hartford Legal Aid

Reported by: Josh Reyes, Abigail Lockwood

Date: 3/26/2024