

Lou Mansolillo

From: Melonie Perez <melonie@daretowin.org>
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To: House Corporations Committee
Subject: Support for H7612

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Dear Chairman Solomon Jr, Vice Chair O'Brien, and Honorable Members of the House Corporations Committee,

On behalf of Direct Action for Rights and Equality (DARE), we respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of Bill H7612, an act relating to the termination of utility service for persons who are disabled, seriously ill, or in arrears of payment.

For 40 years, DARE has organized alongside low-income families and communities of color to advance social, economic, and political justice. Every day at DARE we see how access to basic utilities - electricity, heat, and water - is essential to people's health, stability, and survival.

Currently, Rhode Island law provides only three weeks of protection from utility shutoffs for individuals who are seriously ill or in arrears. This is simply not enough. Serious medical conditions do not resolve in three weeks, and families facing these challenges need more time to stabilize their health and their circumstances.

Even more concerning, the current system allows utility companies—not physicians—to determine how long an illness is expected to last. This leaves medically vulnerable individuals and their families exposed during some of the most critical and fragile moments of their lives.

H7612 offers a fair and necessary solution. By extending protections to a longer, more realistic timeframe and ensuring that qualified physicians determine the duration of illness, this bill aligns Rhode Island with more humane standards already in place in neighboring states like Connecticut. This change would give families the time they need to recover, plan, and avoid the devastating consequences of losing essential utilities.

At DARE, we regularly work with individuals who are forced to choose between paying utility bills, affording medical care, buying food, or keeping up with rent. These are impossible choices—especially for those who are already seriously ill. Utility shutoffs during times of illness can worsen health conditions, lead to hospitalization, and create long-term instability for entire families.

This bill does not eliminate a person's responsibility to pay for utility services. Instead, it provides critical time and protection so that people can recover and work toward solutions without facing immediate harm.

H7612 is about dignity, public health, and common sense. It ensures that Rhode Island does not put medically vulnerable residents at further risk during times of serious illness.

We respectfully urge the Committee to pass House Bill 7612.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Direct Action for Rights and Equality (DARE) Melonie Perez Behind The Walls Committee Organizer DARE Direct Action for
Rights and Equality
340 Lockwood St
Providence, RI 02907
(401) 291-0465
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