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Subject: Testimony in Favor of H7880

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From: Donna Walsh , Member of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul

I am writing in support of House Bill 7880 ,the Percentage of Income Plan,also known as PIPP. As a member of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in Charlestown Rhode Island, I serve with a group of volunteers who work directly with neighbors in need.Calls to our help line for assistance with utility bills has more than doubled since last year because Rhode Island experienced the largest increase in electricity prices in New England and the second highest in the country over the past 12 months.Our families are struggling to keep up with rising utility bills. Our conference records show that we have helped 43 families with utility bills this past year. Our society has conferences throughout Rhode Island and our records indicate that we have helped 1167 households with assistance totaling \$326,794.86. These households live paycheck to paycheck, even a single high energy bill can mean choosing between paying for heat or paying for food, medication or even rent. A PIPP Plan would provide much needed stability by capping utility payments at an affordable percentage of a household's income , ensuring that families ,,can keep their lights and heat on as well as pay for other basic needs Eight other states have successfully implemented Percentage of Income Payment Plans. These programs have reduced utility shut offs, prevented homelessness and improved payment consistency for utility providers. By adopting a similar model our State can protect vulnerable residents,including seniors on a fixed income,people with disabilities, and working families facing temporary financial hardship. Access to electricity and heat is not a luxury – – it is essential for health, safety and economic stability.PIPP would promote fairness, reduce long- term arrearages, and help families avoid the devastating consequences of service disconnection.