



March 12, 2024

Representative Athena Hollins
471 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: Support for HF 4558 – Utility Billing in Single-Metered Buildings

Dear Representative Hollins,

I am writing on behalf of the Citizens Utility Board of Minnesota (CUB) to express support for HF 4558. This bill provides important protections for renters who receive utility billing through a landlord or third-party rebilling company.

CUB is a nonprofit advocate for Minnesota energy consumers. CUB staff has consulted directly with renters who have faced serious difficulties related to the rebilling of their utility services. Together with Xcel Energy, Energy CENTS, the Legal Service Advocacy Project, and Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid, we have also sought regulatory remedies for some of these issues before the Public Utilities Commission.

This bill presents a reasonable middle ground. It provides many important protections that are currently lost by renters who do not receive utility service directly from a utility company, cooperative, or municipal agency, though it does not guarantee all of the protections afforded to utility ratepayers. It also provides renters with recourse for disputes with landlords or third-party rebilling companies. At the same time, it allows landlords or third-party companies to charge tenants for administrative costs associated with rebilling.

CUB respectfully recommends one change to the bill. The bill as written requires that landlords offer payment agreements for the payment of utility service arrears or undercharges, and that those payment agreements “be consistent with the tenant’s financial circumstances and any extenuating circumstances of the household.” However, the bill requires landlords to offer such agreements only to low-income households. In contrast, utility ratepayers at all income levels are granted this right (Minn. Stat. 216B.098, subd. 3). In CUB’s experience, the right to a reasonable payment agreement is vital for households at various income levels, and it is important to allow households to receive payment agreements without having to first provide proof of their income.

Thank you for your consideration, and thank you for carrying this important bill.

Sincerely,

Annie Levenson-Falk
Executive Director

cc: Chair Acomb, Republican Lead Swedzinski, and Members, Climate and Energy Finance and Policy Committee
Mike Molzahn, Committee Administrator
Joe Birkholz, Office of Governor Tim Walz