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Testimony in Opposition to

SB 110, AN ACT CONCERNING FRAUD PREVENTION IN

CONNECTICUT'S UTILITY TERMINATION PROTECTION PROGRAMS.

Energy and Technology Committee Public Hearing

February 20, 2014

Senator Duff, Representative Reed, Senator LeBeau, Representative Steinberg, and
Members of the Energy and Technology Committee,

My name is Jennifer Castonguay from Bristol, and I would like to start by saying thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I am here today in opposition to SB 110, An Act Concerning Fraud Prevention in Connecticut's Utility Termination Protection Programs. While I can appreciate the utility companies position on fraudulent use of the protection programs, the harm this would cause would be devastating to the residents it is supposed to serve in our state.

I am here today to urge the committee to oppose SB 110 which is an act concerning fraud prevention in CT's utility termination protection programs. Programs like this were created to protect the consumer and the company in regards to accounts that are not paid regularly in full.

It is no secret that fraud exists all around us, and as long as some people think they can get away with it, it will continue to plague our programs. Why would we allow the most vulnerable and needy part of our society to be subject to further red tape to get the services that were set up to help that group in the first place? Imposing lengthy, complicated applications for these protections will deter many people that honestly require them from applying for the programs at all.

Secondly, many citizens rely on those programs to get them through what we all know can be tough New England winters, and come spring, accounts can be caught up as

electricity use decreases. The honest people using this program are not looking for a hand out, just for patience and flexibility in the payment of what they have used. Targeting them is the wrong solution to the fraud problem. The ones that abuse the system should be hunted out. The ones that don't pay anything during the protection months should be fully investigated as to their eligibility for the program.

Thirdly, the harm that may come to the ailing portion of the population relying on programs like this would be devastating. Taking away electricity could deny patients the equipment and medications that keep them functioning or even keep them alive. A person that uses a home nebulizer, oxygen delivery systems, or needs regular breathing treatments would be put at an unbelievable risk without them. Also, any person that has a medication requiring refrigeration would be put in jeopardy, including Multiple sclerosis patients like myself. Without the injections we take either weekly, daily, or otherwise, would put us at risk of having a full relapse or exacerbation requiring lengthy hospital or nursing home stays. A diabetic patient could go into shock or even a diabetic coma, leading to permanent disability or even death. Aren't these the dangers these protection programs are trying to prevent?

And finally, if a qualified medical provider says a patient is ill, why does a utility company have a need to argue the validity of that assessment? If their argument is that the doctor just signed it off and no real need for protection exists, then the suspicion should be with the doctor, not necessarily with the patient.

Now I am not arrogant enough to think I have all the solutions to these problems, and I am sure ideas have been discussed among the utility providers, but why not speak to the public on ways to better prevent fraud. Organizations abound in our state that would be able to set up guidelines or answer questions about the problem, and may have some ideas on how to help. Even patients like myself could offer ways to make these processes more effective and less costly.

Please oppose this bill, as the harm it would do far out reaches the financial benefit.

Thank you for your time today, and I would like to answer any questions I may be able to.