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Date: March 21, 2023

RE: 278, Requiring public utilities to report information regarding customer assistance programs, account delinquencies and disconnections.
Oral-Virtual
Proponent

FROM: Maxine Goucher, AARP Kansas Executive Council Member
Edith Gaines, AARP Kansas, 785-221-2827

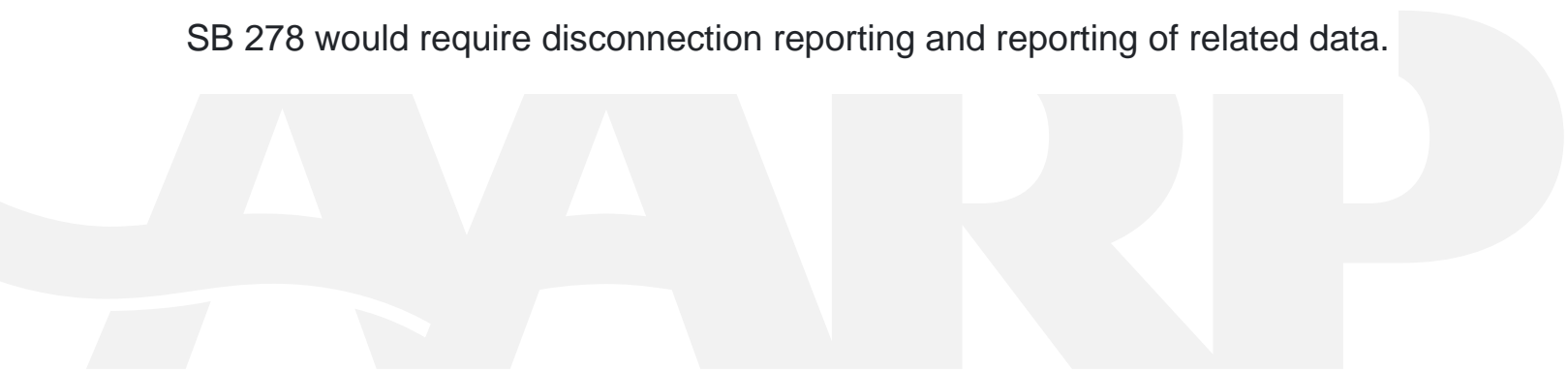
To: The Honorable, Sen. Robert Olson, Chair
Senate Committee on Utilities

Chairman Olson and Committee members, my name is Maxine Goucher and I am a member of the AARP Kansas Executive Council. AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to helping people ages 50 and older to improve their quality of life as they age. Thank you, on behalf of AARP Kansas's more than 278,000 members, for considering our testimony in support of SB 278. We fight for affordable utility rates to make sure that people can remain in their homes and communities.

Utility service is essential. Customers should only be disconnected as a last resort, if ever. However, utility disconnection data is lacking.

Only 33 states and Washington, D.C. require utilities to disclose disconnections. There is no federal oversight to address this lack of transparency. It is an emerging issue due to disconnections which rose during COVID. Without transparency, the Kansas Corporation Commission (KCC) has no knowledge of the potential magnitude of the problem.

SB 278 would require disconnection reporting and reporting of related data.



The KCC would issue an annual report and open a docket as well:

On or before July 30, 2024, the commission shall open a proceeding concerning the reporting by public utilities of historical data on customer assistance programs, service disconnections and debt collection, including:

- (1) The number of customers enrolled in customer assistance programs;*
- (2) the number of service disconnections;*
- (3) the number of service reconnections;*
- (4) the number of customers in arrears and the total dollar amount owned and average amount owed by those customers; and*
- (5) other information the commission deems appropriate to promote the health, safety and welfare of the public.*

AARP supports this important bill.

Not only will it shine a light on utility disconnection issues, it may also be used to ensure that customers are enrolled in assistance programs.

Transparency in this area is critical and this bill will ensure that disconnections get the attention they deserve by requiring utility companies to release information about them.

Such transparency will help enable disconnection policy reforms.

Respectfully

Maxine Goucher