

MEMORANDUM OF SUPPORT

ALLOW DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS TO CANCEL UTILITY CONTRACTS WITHOUT PENALTY

S.1557 Parker

The New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NYSCADV) supports the intention of legislation to **enable domestic violence victims to cancel utility service contracts in order to break away from their abusers.**

Provision of utilities is essential to all modern, domestic households, but high utility costs can present unique challenges, particularly to households experiencing domestic violence. Abusers often exert power and control over their victims by controlling the household's finances and spending. Abusers can orchestrate the imposition of household debts on victims, and in some cases, liability for significant debts they did not cause. The inability to pay off existing debt, or the prospect of incurring exorbitant fees to break existing contracts, often lead victims to remain in households with their abusers.

This legislation would enable victims to break shared contracts with gas, electric or steam service providers without charge. New York State already permits domestic violence survivors to break similar bundled or family-plan contracts with telephone, cable and satellite TV service providers.

NYSCADV supports passage of this bill which would amend the public service law to permit a domestic violence victim under contract with a utility company to opt-out of such contract without charge if they make such request in writing.

NYSCADV is committed to working with bill sponsors to amend the bill to make it easier for victims to avail themselves of the proposed accommodation by allowing domestic violence victims to provide a self-attestation of their status as a domestic violence victim to break such contracts. Domestic violence victims are able to provide such a self-attestation to take advantage of New York's Paid Safe Leave. NYSCADV is also interested in working with bill sponsors to evaluate the potential for expanding the legislation to include contracts with Internet service providers.

ABOUT NYSCADV:

Established in 1978, NYSCADV is designated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as the information clearinghouse, primary point of contact, and resource center on domestic violence for the State of New York. NYSCADV is responsible for supporting the development of policies, protocol, and procedures to enhance domestic violence intervention and prevention and also provides education and technical assistance to the network of primary-purpose domestic violence service providers statewide.

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