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Written Opponent Testimony on House Bill 798
House Select Committee on Energy Policy & Oversight
December 8, 2020
Holly Holtzen, AARP Ohio

Chair Hoops, Vice Chair Abrams, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of AARP. As a nonpartisan, social mission organization representing individuals aged 50-plus with a national membership of 37 million and approximately 1.5 million members in Ohio, AARP is deeply concerned about the prospect of House Bill 6's ratepayer-funded bailout plan taking effect in January 2021. AARP works to strengthen communities and advocate for what matters most to families, with a focus on health security, financial stability, and personal fulfillment. It is the negative impact of meritless utility rate increases on older Ohioans' financial security that brings us here today.

Unfortunately, we are here today to oppose House Bill 798, legislation that simply delays bad policy for Ohio consumers. This is particularly frustrating to our organization when we know there are other solutions available right here in this chamber that Ohioans are not being given the opportunity to weigh in on, such as House Bill 772, which we strongly support.

Signing this nuclear bailout bill into law was always bad for Ohio consumers, but the impact of COVID-19 has only made the choices many Ohioans have to make between paying for food, medicine, housing, and utilities even more dire. Even before COVID-19, utilities compromised a high proportion of older citizens' household budgets, and many Ohio citizens over 65 found it a challenge to pay their existing bills. Nor is it fair for Ohio's age 50-plus owners of small businesses to be forced to subsidize the ill-gotten gains of a publicly-traded corporation slated to turn a profit of \$515 million this year.¹ Any policy that raises utility bills, particularly during a pandemic, should take into consideration the impact on these very vulnerable Ohioans.

As outrageous as it was to ask Ohioans to bailout shareholders, House Bill 6 included other baffling provisions such as forcing Ohioans to finance a \$450 million subsidy to support the Ohio Valley Electric Corporation, including a coal-powered plant in Indiana, and a \$68 million guaranteed profit mechanism, also called decoupling, for FirstEnergy. House Bill 798 falls short in addressing these issues, In contrast HB 772

¹ See G.A. 133, S.B. No. 346, Testimony of NRG Energy, Inc., delivered by Judith Lagano (Nov. 10, 2020) (FES/Energy Harbor in its May 2020, 2020-2022 Financial Outlook projecting \$515 million, \$585 million, and \$645 million for next three years).

would repeal the anti-consumer surcharges to support Ohio's two nuclear power plants while also repealing and refunding Ohioans for House Bill 6 payments that have already been collected.

We ask that you reject the delay policies offered in House Bill 798 and strongly request your support of House Bill 772 to repeal the anti-consumer subsidies previously enacted in House Bill 6 and urgently pass this legislation for Governor DeWine's consideration before the end of the current legislative session. Any policy that raises utility bills, particularly during a pandemic, should consider the impact on vulnerable Ohioans, and House Bill 798 only delays bad consumer policy rather than addressing the underlying issue and repealing House Bill 6 subsidies completely. Thank you for this opportunity to share our opponent testimony regarding House Bill 772.