

February 16, 2021

Rosemary Chiavetta, Secretary
Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission
400 North Street
Keystone Bldg.
Harrisburg, PA 17105

***Re: COVID-19 Utility Termination Moratorium and Low-Income Consumer Protections
Docket No. M-2020-3019244***

We, the undersigned elected officials, agencies, organizations, associations, and individuals from all corners of Pennsylvania, urge the Commission to extend the prohibition on involuntary termination for “protected customers” with income at or below 300% of the federal poverty level. We also strongly encourage the Commission to adopt an equitable, statewide plan for the resolution of utility arrears that does not exacerbate the economic devastation and public health crisis facing low-income communities. Uninterrupted, affordable utility service is essential to helping families survive and recover from this pandemic.

The Commission should extend the prohibition on involuntary termination of “protected customers” because utility terminations remain a threat to public health and safety.

In March 2020, the Commission wisely implemented a utility termination moratorium, noting that “irreparable injury to the public is likely to occur with disruption of service, creating a clear and present danger to life.”ⁱ In October 2020, the Commission modified the moratorium order, allowing utility terminations to resume but providing consumer protections to those at or below 300% of the federal poverty level. COVID-19 continues to devastate Pennsylvania communities and necessitates the continuation of a utility termination moratorium. As of January 30, 2021, the daily rate of COVID-19 diagnoses remains high, at 3,944 cases. Tragically, more than 21,000 Pennsylvanians have lost their lives to this pandemic and many more deaths are expected to follow in the coming months.ⁱⁱ Public health experts note that, notwithstanding recent efforts to vaccinate the public, this pandemic is far from over. Pennsylvania remains in a state of emergency, and both state and federal officials have continued to direct Pennsylvanians to take a variety of precautions to prevent the transmission of the virus – which continues to evolve in new and unpredictable ways.ⁱⁱⁱ

In light of the ongoing public health emergency, we urge the Commission to extend the prohibition on involuntary termination of “protected customers” contained in its October Order. Without further action from the Commission, low-income utility consumers will likely suffer catastrophic harm when utilities resume utility terminations in the spring. A recent study found that utility moratoria nationwide reduced COVID-19 infections by 4.4% and mortality rates by 7.4%.^{iv} Termination of utility service makes homes unsafe and uninhabitable, and places families and whole communities at risk of physical and financial harm.

The Commission should adopt an equitable plan for the resolution of utility arrears.

Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, millions of Pennsylvanians - disproportionately from low income, Black, and Latinx communities - are out of work, or have experienced a substantial reduction in income.^v At the same time, families continue to stay home to prevent the spread of the deadly virus, causing utility usage and costs to remain abnormally high. As a result, households have struggled to keep up with mounting utility bills, and have accrued a staggering level of debt.^{vi} Those debts are likely to continue to accrue during the recovery period.

The solution to this unprecedented accrual of debt is not to turn off service – forcing people from their homes. Such a result is unconscionable, and will only exacerbate the current public health crisis, disproportionately affect Black and Latinx neighborhoods and compounding deep economic and racial inequities laid bare throughout the pandemic. We urge the Commission to ensure that all consumers have access to flexible payment options – including comprehensive arrearage management and debt forgiveness programming – to help stabilize struggling families and eliminate the lingering threat of utility termination.

The Commission should not place the full responsibility for repayment of these arrears solely upon the shoulders of residential utility ratepayers. COVID-19 has had devastating effects on Pennsylvania’s economy. As of the end of 2020 more than 2.5 million Pennsylvanians are unemployed/have filed for unemployment.^{vii} The Commission should adopt an innovative and equitable approach that spreads the responsibility for these arrears across all sectors of our society.

We urge the Commission to extend consumer protections to Pennsylvanians who are most vulnerable.

This Commission has acted boldly to protect Pennsylvanians from harm since the start of the pandemic. We urge the Commission to continue to demonstrate the same dynamic leadership by extending the current prohibition on termination for protected customers and implementing a comprehensive consumer protection plan that includes an equitable strategy for the resolution of utility arrears. While we have all grown weary of the pandemic, the threat to public health and safety remains and must compel the Commission to take further action to protect our most vulnerable community members. This requires the Commission to protect low income households from the loss of services until the pandemic subsides and utilities have developed an equitable plan to address mounting arrears that will avoid widespread terminations that will hinder Pennsylvania’s broader recovery.

Respectfully submitted,



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On behalf of the following signatories:

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Organizations, Agencies, and Associations

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All Together Now Pennsylvania

Audubon Pennsylvania

Black Women's Policy Agenda

Bridging the Gap Development, LLC

Bucks County Audubon Society

Community Action Association of Pa.
(CAAP)

Center for Coalfield Justice

Center in the Park

Central Pennsylvania Food Bank

Chester County Food Bank

Chester/Delco Environmental Justice

Citizens for Pennsylvania's Future
(PennFuture)

Civically Incorporated

Casa San Jose	Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in PA
Clean Air Council	Manna on Main Street
Clean Water Action	Maranatha-Carlisle
Commission on Economic Opportunity	Mazzoni Center
Community Justice Project	Montgomery County Community Action Development Commission
Community Partners For Change	National Nurse-Led Care Consortium
Disability Rights Pennsylvania	Neighbors Against the Gas Plants
Earth Quaker Action Team	Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)
Earthjustice	PA Debt Collective
ECA	PA Stands Up
Episcopal Legal Aid	Partnership for Better Health
Evangelical Environmental Network	Pennsylvania Public Interest Research Group (PennPIRG)
Food & Water Watch	Pennsylvania Council of Churches
Goodley Law LLC	Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project
Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank	Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, Inc.
Green Building United	People's Emergency Center
HACE	Philadelphia Climate Works
HIAS Pennsylvania	Philadelphia Energy Authority
Hill District Consensus Group	Philly Thrive
Housing Alliance of PA	Phoenixville Community Health Foundation
Hunger-Free Pennsylvania	Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations
Johnstown NAACP Branch #2266-B	Pittsburgh Food Policy Council
Justice at Work	Pittsburghers for Public Transit
Keystone Energy Efficiency Alliance	POWER
League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania	Reclaim Philadelphia
Legal Clinic for the Disabled, Inc.	Stern Community Lawyering Clinic, Drexel's Kline School of Law

Regional Housing Legal Services	Support Center for Child Advocates
SACA	Sustainable Pittsburgh
SCC Opportunity Network	The Foundation for Delaware County
Schuylkill Community Action	The Women's Center, Inc. of Columbia / Montour County
SeniorLAW Center	Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Ligonier Valley
Shippensburg Community Resource Coalition	Westmoreland County Food Bank, Inc.
Sierra Club of Pennsylvania	Women's Law Project
SisTers PGH	Women's Resource Center
Solar United Neighbors of Pennsylvania	Working for Justice Ministry, St. Paul's United Methodist Church
Somali Bantu Community Association of Pittsburgh	215 People's Alliance
Southern Chester County Opportunity Network	350 Philadelphia
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ⁱ Emergency Order entered March 13, 2020 at 2, <https://www.puc.pa.gov/pcdocs/1658422.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Cases.aspx>

ⁱⁱⁱ Pennsylvania remains under a stay at home advisory, with limits on in-person operations of businesses and limitations on the number of individuals who can gather together indoors. *See* <https://www.pa.gov/guides/responding-to-covid-19/>. In addition, new coronavirus variants are emerging, causing experts to double down on mask and social distancing advice. *See* <https://www.inquirer.com/health/coronavirus/coronavirus-double-mask-variants-mutations-20210128.html>

^{iv} *See* Housing Precarity & the COVID-19 Pandemic: Impacts of Utility Disconnection and Eviction Moratoria on Infections and Deaths across US Counties, https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w28394/w28394.pdf. Applying Pennsylvania numbers, this means that the current moratorium on termination saved approximately 1500 lives and prevented nearly 37,000 infections.

^v As of January 18, 2021, 23% of Pennsylvanians expected someone in their household to have a loss of employment income in the next 4 weeks. <https://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/hhp/#/>

^{vi} Based on data reported by the utilities at this docket, regulated utility debts have reached nearly \$812 million as of December 31, 2020, up 64% from December 2019. In addition, over 847,000 accounts were eligible for termination as of December 31, 2020, up 17% from December 2019.

^{vii} <https://www.uc.pa.gov/COVID-19/Statistics/Pages/UC-Claim-Statistics.aspx>. To date in 2021, more than 100,000 claims have been filed for unemployment.

Will Utility Terminations Impact You or Your Community? How?

“I am disabled and on a fixed income. But I am only eligible for 16\$ a month in food stamps. So it’s with feed my daughter or pay utilities. And the utilities are up because everyone is home during the pandemic and normally there would be school. I could normally turn my heat off during the day because no one would be home but me and I can use a blanket if I get cold. I have removed lightbulbs put a lock on my thermostat everything because I don’t know what is going to happen.

I don’t know what I am going to do. My bill is 2000 behind and liheap doesn’t help that much either. We are one of the richest countries but treat our citizens like nothing.”

-Anonymous

“Everything in my home runs on electric. I will not have any lights, nor will I have heat or cooling and I will be unable to eat/cook food.

It [utility debt] sets me back from catching up with water bill, prescription cost and co-pays at doctors office and test, adding to lowering my credit score.”

-Anonymous

“I would not like to see the utilities shut off. They should extend the program because people are suffering out here. It's cold, people are suffering, and people have to get their bills together. Some people don't have jobs during this time and we should have more time to get our utilities together. Of course they're gonna make us pay all these utilities back, but some people don't have money to pay any utilities! We need more time. We definitely need more time. Please take consideration that people need more time and that we really are suffering out here and that we need help.

I'm not saying that we aren't going to pay our utilities. Just that we need more time and that we're not seeing nobody without lights, or water, or gas at this time. It's not fair. We didn't ask for this.

My house has a lot of drafts. I use more heat. I have to use more electric, more heaters. I have heaters running in every room of the house and in the hallway. But that causes you to use more utilities and now it's going to go up even more.

My landlord knocks on the door the 3rd of the month. He don't care about COVID, or that you can't do work nowhere. They want their money, so you gotta pay it. If you don't pay it, you're going to be behind when it's all over. So you're struggling to get everything paid up, and you gotta buy food and all that stuff. I'm not working nowhere. I need food for us to eat. I'm trying to make it from one day to the next with me and my son and it's very hard. I'm not going to sit here and pretend like it's easy-- it's not! It's not easy. And I feel sorry for those who don't have even one dollar coming in.”

-Sonya A Sanders, Philadelphia PA

“You need more time. Everybody can't just jump right in and pay if they cut it off. Everyone's low-income. It's not only just bills they have to pay, you gotta buy food-- sometimes you don't even get enough food stamps. You gotta buy food, you gotta buy household items like cleaning supplies, toiletry supplies, all that. So it's not gonna be easy at all.”

-Annette Johnson, Philadelphia PA

“They don't care because they know that we got that stimulus money. They feel like when we got that stimulus money we should've paid our bills, our rent, our gas, our electric. That money ain't last that long. That money go in one hand and out the other. But they're like 'You got that money. You should've paid your rent.’”

-Carol Foy, Philadelphia PA

“They did give everyone that stimulus money to pay up their rent and whatever. But for those people that lost their jobs-- okay, I'm going to pay my rent because I want to keep a roof over my head. But how am I going to feed my kids? Because all of my stimulus money has gone to my rent to keep a roof over my head. How am I going to feed my kids? How am I going to get carfare to go get my kids' computer from school to keep them virtual for school? They gave out that stimulus money-- and a lot of people didn't do what they had to do with it-- but most of us, we did do what we had to do with it. And we are still struggling because we chose a roof over our heads, but now we're barely able to feed our kids. And now we are struggling to keep internet and keep this computer online for our kids.”

-Janette Ramson, Philadelphia PA

“A utility shut off would impact me greatly, I care for my elderly Mother”

-Wendy Hernandez, Philadelphia PA

“Yes. If there is a utility shutoff, I will not have the electricity that helps me distribute food to folks in my neighborhood and I would not be able to sustain my own food. I have been waiting 14 weeks for unemployment compensation and have had no income since first week of November. My bill is now at over \$800 and I had to sign up for a payment arrangement to ensure it doesn't get shut off, even though I have no idea how I will get the money to pay it.”

-Elvia Ramirez-Vidal, Philadelphia PA

“Yes, I have two young children and do not work at the moment due to daughter not in school.”

-Samantha Serrano, Philadelphia PA

“A utility shutoff would impact me in various ways: as a Diabetic I need refrigeration to keep my medicine chilled and well as other medical needs. I also need the utilities to keep life sustaining electronics running.”

- Terrence Chambers, Philadelphia PA

“We've personally been lucky enough to just have enough to cover our utilities so far through the pandemic mostly due to assistance programs. But, if any of our bills get remotely higher we won't be able to pay for them. Most of our neighbors are behind on their utility bills and despite unemployment being extended there isn't enough money to get caught up on bills to get out of the red. In the middle of a cold winter, during a pandemic, with most of our neighbors out of work shutoffs would be devastating to our community. There isn't enough relief or assistance for people when it comes to paying their bills while they are out of work through no fault of their own. Continuing to punish people who are doing everything to stay afloat by allowing utility shutoffs just makes it harder to get back on their feet. Being poor is incredibly expensive and we need to be doing everything possible to assist people and not make it harder to make it through impossibly difficult times.”

-Julia Rowe, Philadelphia PA

“Yes. I have fallen behind during the pandemic due to loss of two sources of my income. I am trying to get caught up.”

- Daninia Jordan, Philadelphia PA

“We serve low income, disabled and vulnerable seniors in PA, who are at the epicenter of the COVID-19 crisis and will be severely impacted by a utility shutoff, which will mean homelessness, lack of basic needs, health supports and possibly death to thousands of older Pennsylvanians.”

-Karen Buck, SeniorLaw Center, Philadelphia PA

“It is imperative for all Philadelphian's to maintain access to gas, electricity and water throughout the duration of the pandemic. The health impacts of shut offs can be seen in every area of our clients lives. Temperature extremes have well demonstrated health and safety risks on our pregnant, youngest, oldest and health compromised residents up to and including death. Due to COVID-19 Residents are currently unable to seek safe public places such as schools, libraries and shopping places to warm or cool themselves. Residents are being asked to stay home and limit their contact with others including family members and friends that they may normally utilize as a safe space during a utility shut off. Couch surfing and overcrowding increase the risk of COVID transmission. Residents rely on having hot water to bathe, wash hands effectively clean and sanitize their dishes.

Residents rely on electricity to light their homes, refrigerate their food, heat their food, run computers and internet which are currently necessary for school as we still have not returned to in person instruction and it looks as though we will not return to full time in-person instruction until after the completion of this school year. Many residents rely on refrigeration for safe storage of their medication and breastmilk and electricity to run medical equipment such as nebulizer machines for asthma, breast pumps for milk expression or motorized equipment for mobility that needs to be charged. As someone who regularly advocated for medical certifications to keep the most vulnerable from losing their access to utilities, I can say the process is often onerous, poorly understood by residents, physicians and utility company representatives, and complicated to navigate. Once a utility is shut off reconnection can be more

difficult, and I have seen families face weeks of disruption while trying to get them in place. For parents with young children in the home utility shut-offs may lead to unnecessary child welfare reporting and involvement. Many families with young children are afraid to seek help with utility issues or to report that they have young children in the home due to valid concerns of poverty related neglect charges. No child should ever be removed from a loving, safe family due solely to financial need, but it happens. Philadelphia's child welfare system does have prevention funds to address financial needs like housing and utilities to prevent families from becoming engaged with DHS but this fund is usually quickly exhausted. The larger Emergency Fund is only available to families with open DHS cases.

Many landlords include stipulations in their leases that allow evictions related to utility shut-offs and debt. Again, it is more dangerous than ever for families to become homeless, couch surf or move into overcrowded conditions. The Office of Homeless Services is currently completely overwhelmed by the pandemic. They are turning families and individuals away every day and for families that are accepted into shelter they face safety risks associated with congregate care settings during a pandemic.

Most of the families I serve were utility burdened and at high risk of shut-off before COVID and have only become more vulnerable as we near the one-year mark since the shut-down. Single parent households especially those headed by BIPOC are at greatest risk. Allowing and onslaught of utility shut-offs and debt is a public health crisis in the making. You have the power to stop it. Please consider these recommendations.

Thank you.”

- Erin Blair, BSN, RN, National Nurse-Led Care Consortium, Philadelphia PA

“Yes. As an Administrative and Outreach Coordinator serving Wilkesburg and the greater Pittsburgh and Allegheny region, the idea to shutoff utilities services in the midst of a global pandemic, would be devastating to families, friends and the community as a whole. There's already a need-gap with desire conditions that haven't been addressed, meanwhile there are 13,000-14,000 residents that have been evicted since September of 2020. The government lag in federal dollars to help has worse many lives, forcing people to leave their homes, find shelter, move in with family, friends or complete strangers. This is unconscionable to not speak up and fight for not just equality, equity but humanity. No one should be left without the basic necessities including, heat and water. There are children, sick, elderly and everyday folks struggling with health and mental conditions that it's inhumane to do nothing. We must do better as a nation in addressing these conditions, because we are all one step away from poverty, danger and the unknowns that we could find ourselves in need. When one person is left behind, out in the cold with no food, shelter or place to call home, no one is safe or immune from this. We are only as strong as our fellowmen and fellow-women within our communities. Together we will rise and fight to protect the most vulnerable people, or we will find ourselves or the next generation with the burdensome.”

-Jay Carter, Civically Incorporated, Pittsburgh PA

“Most members of the community that we serve are low income families. They were already struggling to pay their utilities bills prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.”

-Aweys Mwaliya, Somali Bantu Community Association of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh PA

“Yes, my community is already experiencing high utility debt and evictions as well,”

-Carol Hardeman, Hill District Consensus Group, Pittsburgh PA

“Manna on Main Street serves households experiencing food insecurity. Since March 2020, we have seen a 200% increase in food need and a 100% increase in requests for help with rent and utilities. While some people have returned to work, many face pressure from unpaid utility bills and rent making it difficult to impossible to catch up.”

-Suzan Neiger Gould, Manna on Main Street, Lansdale PA

“Yes. We provide rental assistance to families hoping to avoid their homelessness and are hearing stories of utility arrearages.”

-Kathy Desmond, People’s Emergency Center, Philadelphia PA

“Transit riders are at the intersection of multiple economic and public health crises. Riders during COVID-19 are disproportionately very low income, and are majority Black and Brown folks. They are at higher risk of having lost their jobs or having work hours reduced because of the pandemic, and are more likely to contract COVID and suffer long term adverse health outcomes. Utilities--particularly in winter-- are as essential as the access to housing, transportation, food and healthcare. Transit riders cannot continue to negotiate these impossible choices, and utility shutoff moratorium must be in place to allow our neighbors to survive this pandemic and to begin to rebuild after it passes.”

-Laura Chu Wiens, Pittsburghers for Public Transit, Pittsburgh PA

“Utility shutoffs will directly impact the housing stability of households who have fallen behind on payments. This will have a significant impact in our community as many residents have fallen behind on payments.”

-David R. Young, Schuylkill Community Action, Pottsville PA

“There are many families in my area that are lower income and might be struggling right now, who would be impacted by this issue.”

-Kim Anderson, Evangelical Environmental Network, Ebensburg PA

“Yes - ECA serves upwards of 5,000 low-to moderate-income households on an annual basis for heater repair/ replacement and for energy efficiency upgrades. If a home has had its service shut off, we are unable to perform our work for the low-income client.”

-Steve Luxton, Energy Coordinating Agency, Philadelphia PA

“In the time of COVID it is shocking that so many members of our community are also threatened by having energy cut off. In a moral and humane society would you really want the poorest of the poor, the most impacted by health inequities also to be without the basic resource of energy to cook and to stay warm in the winter? Is this about life or about money? Energy is a human right!”

-Bishop Dwayne Royster, POWER, Philadelphia PA

“It would definitely impact the communities that HIAS PA services and it would impact the growing community of low income residents in my home county, Montgomery. Note that my organization is situated in Philadelphia but serves residents all over Pennsylvania.”

-Cathryn Miller Wilson, HIAS PA, Philadelphia PA

“Yes, the community I serve has been impacted by utility shutoff. Our clients are of marginalize community with preexisting conditions that requires their utility on at all times and due to lost of income are unable to.”

-Sandra Valdez, SACA, Lancaster PA

“Both utility shut off and utility debt would impact the safety and stability of victims of domestic and sexual violence.”

-Christy Roberson, The Women’s Center Inc., Bloomsburg PA

“The community we serve is impacted severely by utility debt - the plight of the poor in Chester County is that of continually "robbing Peter to pay Paul" just to get by each month, and so families are often are forced to choose between putting food on the table and staying current with their bills. COVID-19 has exacerbated that impact in an unprecedented way.”

-Kate Daneker, Southern Chester County Opportunity Network, Kennett Square PA

“We advocate on behalf of the Black community in Johnstown, a city with a poverty rate of nearly 40% and a median income that is less than half the statewide median. Many of our members, their families, and loved ones would be at risk of utility termination if the shutoff moratorium where ended.”

-Allan Cashaw, Johnstown Branch NAACP, Johnstown PA

“Both the community where I live and the community where our church resides contains many low-income families. One outreach our church participates in is Fresh Express which provides food to low income individuals and families through Westmoreland Food Bank. . We have participated in this service for many years and the number of families who qualify for this has only increased over the years. Those waiting in long lines for food would also be the ones struggling to pay utility bills since they are struggling to provide the basics for their families.”

- Karlice Makuchan, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship - Ligonier Valley, Johnstown PA

“With all Philadelphia schools having online learning, utility shut-offs will directly affect the ability of school children to get online for school or to be warm while doing remote school.”

-Jeni Wright, AIDS Law Project of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia PA

“The majority of the community we serve are living below the poverty levels, and the impact of the pandemic has made financial situations much worse. The households need more programs, funds and time to work out this crisis.”

-Amanda Garayua, HACE, Philadelphia PA

“We serve our transgender communities of Pittsburgh and our trans communities not only suffer with housing insecurities but when obtaining housing being able to afford the utilities because of the discrimination within the predominantly cis employers who a majority of the time discriminate against trans people from being employed.”

- Ciora Thomas, SisTers PGH, Pittsburgh PA

“Yes, I am a legal intern who is representing indigent tenants in Allegheny County, PA. So many are in danger of homelessness, and even if can stay in their homes, losing electricity and/or heat. Many are still in such dire situations from the effects of COVID. We have a responsibility to assist these folks, and at a minimum, not take away basic necessities.”

-Johanna Jones, Apollo PA

“A utility shut-off would definitely negatively impact the community I serve. The same community is certainly impacted by utility debt.”

-William Gibbons, Philadelphia PA

“Many low income families continue to suffer complications due to Coronavirus, especially as it relates to employment. A utility shut off, especially in winter, would be devastating and extremely dangerous.”

-Elizabeth Green, Philadelphia PA

“The community in my area and many children I work with would be impacted by shut offs.”

-Abigail Jackson, Philadelphia PA

“I am a victim advocate for people in Domestic Violence situations, and the financial control and entrapment used by abusers frequently includes tying their victims up in debt and utility accounts they become dependent on the abuser to help resolve. Access to assistance and forgiveness of these utility debts is critical to support victims who urgently need to escape abusive situations.”

-David Zayas, Harrisburg PA

“Yes. I am a high school counselor in Philadelphia and this would significantly impact many of our families.”

-Zoe Siswick, Bala Cynwyd PA

“This would deeply impact the communities I serve. Families are having a very hard time keeping food on the table. The lost of heat and electric would be would put a burden on an already bad situation”

-Lorraine Horton, Philadelphia PA

“Yes, I serve residents of West Philadelphia, many of whom are extremely worried about utilities and owing debt. The lack of heating and other basic utility needs impacts their health and health outcomes.”

-Risa Waldoks, Philadelphia PA

“A utility shut-off would have a detrimental impact on our community as in order for residents to get it turned back on, they have to pay the full sum plus the fee to turn it back on. Our community will not be economically stable by 4/1 and able to afford those costs. I work for a human service organization and we are continuing to get people coming in for assistance with rent and utilities. The bills are high and I know that the utility companies need to pay their own bills but working out a payment plan is much smarter than shutting it off!”

-Sonja Payne, Shippensburg PA

“I am a teacher of low income students in Philadelphia. Utility shutoffs would make it impossible for me to reach my students.”

-Amit Schwalb, Philadelphia PA

“This would impact the communities that I serve greatly because they are already facing many financial hardships and burdens during this pandemic. Even those that find work aren't making enough to pay off the debt that they had to acquire during this hardship. Many people are still looking for work, trying to deal with their children's schooling, and trying not to get evicted.”

-NaTisha C. Washington, Pittsburgh

“While not directly working with individual within these communities, I work as an advocate focused policies projects meant to improve the economic, environmental, and transportation access outcomes within LMI and BIPOC communities. Hence it is of concern to me. Personally, I am not impacted as I am not currently facing an unmanageable utility cost burden.”

-Chris Sandvig, Pittsburgh PA

“I run Mount Airy Groceries which is a food distribution non-profit. My population would be devastated with utility shut offs.”

-Jessica Rights, Philadelphia PA

“I am a community organizer, working with low-income and working Philadelphians who have been hard-hit by the pandemic. Many folks in my community are disabled. Others have kids at home who are trying to do remote school. No matter the situation, a shutoff would adversely affect everyone. The PUC needs to find a way to forgive utility debt for those who have been economically impacted by the pandemic.”

-Embry Wood Owen, Philadelphia PA

“Yes, I work with low-income folks throughout the region for my job, and hear a lot that folks are worried about paying their rent and utilities. Many folks are still struggling right now and more relief is needed.”

-Chris West, Pittsburgh PA

“YES! I work with survivors of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), most of whom are already experiencing numerous financial difficulties due to the abuse they have experienced. Utility shutoffs, especially at the end of the winter moratorium, is a very common issue that we assist our clients with each year. However, the pandemic has added a whole new level of concern for our clients, especially in regards to the lack of increased assistance or plan to help address the utility debt accrued since the start of the pandemic moratorium.”

-Elly Fekete, Pittsburgh PA

“Yes, it would affect the communities I serve as I am a social worker in Philadelphia.”

-Alicia Bond, Upper Darby PA

“Yes. The communities that the Clinic serves are struggling to make ends meet, even after we help them to access all of the public benefits for which they are eligible. Many are under extreme stress. Many are disabled or have chronic illnesses. A utility shutoff would certainly increase stress and may cause or exacerbate illnesses in our clients' households.”

- Medha Makhoul, Carlisle PA

“Many of my clients on Medicaid will suffer due to utility shut offs let alone the fact the diminishing quality of life.”

- Asha Ramachandran, Yardley PA

“I work with the low income community in Northwestern Pennsylvania and premature termination of the utility termination moratorium at this time, as the economy has not yet recovered and Covid is still a significant public health risk, will result in unnecessary harm to a significant number of low-income Pennsylvanians. A different solution must be reached to get utilities paid and the most vulnerable protected from the harms of utility termination.”

-John Gandrud, Erie PA

“I am a researcher with the Energy Rights Project, based in Philadelphia, PA. We have surveyed more than 150 residents since May 2020 to document how people are coping with utility expenses during the pandemic. It is clear from our research that people are experiencing

increased energy needs at home all the while having fewer resources to meet these needs. No story is the same. Some families have children who will need to continue school remotely, and thus need electricity for internet access. Other households have family members with asthma who use nebulizer treatments, which require electricity. Utilities are essential for all aspects of our day to day lives, and all the more so for vulnerable households -- those with children, family members with medical conditions, or who are working to get out under debt. It is imperative that the PUC extend the shutoff moratorium at this time, and to develop a clear, just plan for utility debt forgiveness.”

-Alison Kenner, Philadelphia PA

“Yes. I have been part of Resource Navigation efforts in Allegheny County. Many of the clients who call us have been unable to pay their utilities. If utility shutoffs are allowed it will be a significant danger to their health and safety.”

-Anne Wright, Pittsburgh PA

“Yes, I work with clients each day who are trying to choose between paying rent, keeping lights on, keeping heat on, and feeding their families.”

- Alison Lescisin, Glenshaw PA

“Philadelphia was experiencing energy insecurity prior to the pandemic. The advent of COVID-19 has only worsened the energy burden for communities in Philadelphia, particularly LMI and BIPOC communities. Extending utility protections could go a long way in maintaining families safe and in their homes and away from potential COVID-19 infection.”

-Briana Leone, Philadelphia PA

“Yes, there's so many people who try to be on a budget with the little money they have or make and these programs are really not appropriate or acceptable in the guidelines they set.”

- Delores Brown-Waters, Philadelphia PA