



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

February 16, 2021

The Honorable Rosemary Chiavetta
Secretary, Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission
400 North Street
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Re: Public Utility Service Termination Moratorium, Docket No. M-2020-3019244

Dear Secretary Chiavetta:

I appreciate the opportunity to continue to engage with the Commission regarding protections for utility customers during the COVID-19 pandemic and wish to reiterate my prior thanks for the Commission's leadership during these challenging times. The last year has been among the most difficult Pennsylvania has confronted in recent history as the pandemic has strained our health care system, social safety net, and economy. One of the particular places this strain has become evident is in the number of our fellow Pennsylvanians who are struggling to pay for basic utility services.

The numbers are alarming. According to data submitted by utilities in response to this docket, 1,022,155 electric, gas, water, and telecommunications accounts are currently eligible for termination, an increase of nearly 150,000 from 2019, when utility terminations were already at high levels. According to the same data, utility arrearages have increased by a staggering 67% since 2019, and now total nearly \$1 billion.

In August of last year, I wrote to urge the Commission to continue protections for residential customers, including retaining the moratorium on terminations for customers at or below 300% of the federal poverty line. I was pleased that the Commission's decided to adopt this recommendation, as well as a number of other protections including extended repayment plans, waiver of late fees for small businesses, and flexibility in providing income verification. Unfortunately, these protections were time limited, and remain in effect only until March 31, 2021, without further action by the Commission to extend them further.

My letter from last August also noted that I had been in communication with Pennsylvania's Congressional delegation to urge them to extend unemployment relief to residents. Since that time, I have continued to engage the delegation to advocate for additional federal assistance to residents whose lives and livelihoods have been impacted by the pandemic.

Some of the needed assistance has now been approved, and it appears that more is likely in the near future. In December, Congress approved a significant stimulus package, which directed roughly \$848,000,000 to Pennsylvania in funding for rent and utility assistance. A percentage of that funding was directly allocated to larger counties, which are currently establishing programs to ensure this much needed funding is received by residents. But a larger percentage—\$570,000,000 in total—was directed to the commonwealth, to be distributed to all counties. The General Assembly passed legislation appropriating these funds and establishing a grant program overseen by the Department of Human Services (DHS) and

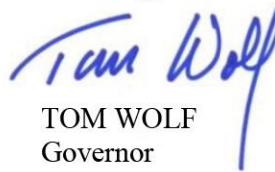
administered by the counties. As Secretary Miller notes in the attached comment, DHS is currently working with the counties to operationalize the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP).

In addition, the current relief legislation being debated by Congress contains a significant additional allocation to the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), which could amount to \$270,000,000 for Pennsylvania, every dollar of which will assist customers currently covered by the Phase II protections. Once approved, these LIHEAP funds, combined with assistance from ERAP, will significantly reduce the impact of the lifting of the moratorium, and prevent potentially hundreds of thousands of Pennsylvanians from facing termination.

I recognize that the utility termination moratorium cannot continue indefinitely. However, I strongly believe that given the trajectory of the pandemic, our progress toward delivering assistance to residents who need it, and the strong likelihood that more utility specific assistance will become available shortly, the Commission should retain the protections that are in place for low-income Pennsylvanians at this time.

As always, I appreciate the Commission's consideration of the points raised above, and its leadership as we collectively navigate these unprecedented challenges.

Sincerely,



TOM WOLF
Governor