

March 23, 2020

NC Governor Roy Cooper  
Office of Governor Roy Cooper  
1 E. Edenton St.  
Raleigh, NC 27601

Chris Ayers, Executive Director  
NC Utilities Commission Public Staff  
430 North Salisbury St.  
Raleigh, NC, 27603

Attorney General Josh Stein  
NC Department of Justice  
114 West Edenton Street  
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Secretary Michael Regan  
NC Dept. of Environmental Quality  
217 W Jones St.  
Raleigh, NC 27603

Charlotte Mitchell, Chair  
NC Utilities Commission  
430 N Salisbury St.  
Raleigh, NC 27603

Secretary Mandy Cohen  
NC Dept. of Health and Human Services  
2001 Mail Service Center  
Raleigh, NC 27699

**RE: Urgent Need To Protect the Public Health of Every Person and Business Impacted by the Coronavirus National Emergency by Expanding Suspension of Utility Disconnection and Late Payment Fees To Utilities Not Covered By the NC Utility Commission Order**

Dear Governor Cooper, NC Attorney General Stein, DHHS Secretary Cohen, NCUC Chair Mitchell, NCUC Public Staff Executive Director Ayers, DEQ Secretary Regan, and the Managers/CEO's of every public and privately owned electric, gas and water utility, telecom company and internet service provider serving North Carolina's communities:

Across the state, your customers and constituents are experiencing economic hardship either due to having contracted the coronavirus, protecting against spreading the virus, or having their jobs and businesses shut down as a result of the response to the crisis. As a result, thousands are already facing the inability to pay for basic services, including electricity and water, and this number will only grow as the virus spreads and the economy declines. Therefore, in this time of crisis it is imperative that we ensure access for every household and business to uninterrupted electricity, water, telephone (mobile and landline) and internet service. It is also critically important to recognize that utilities can be divided into two groups, 1) those regulated by the NC Utilities Commission and 2) those that are not regulated by the NC Utilities Commission.

## NC Utility Commission Regulated Utilities

On March 19th, the NC Utilities Commission ordered all regulated electric, gas, water and wastewater utilities to immediately suspend service disconnections for non-payment and late payment fees during the State of Emergency and provide for other important protections. We are grateful to the Commission for taking decisive action. In addition, in the weeks preceding the order, several utilities regulated by the Utility Commission had already taken unilateral and commendable steps, for example Duke Energy and Dominion Energy implemented significant and helpful policies regarding shut-off suspension, and these companies have already acted to comply with the Commission's new order.

## Non NC Utility Commission-Regulated Utilities

In contrast, we are very concerned that many non commission-regulated utilities have failed to adopt appropriate policies. The Commission order does not apply to these entities, which include 26 rural electric cooperatives, more than 70 municipal electric utilities, and numerous private gas utilities, telecom companies and internet service providers. The co-ops and municipal utilities alone serve more than 1.6 million customers who are not protected by the Commission's order. Many of these have at least voluntarily suspended disconnections for non-payment, and in fewer cases have suspended late payment fees, but a significant number have not.

In response, and on behalf of our thousands of members and constituencies, we, the undersigned organizations, call on Governor Cooper to immediately issue an emergency order that applies to every non commission-regulated utility and service company across the state, and ensure that the order implements the following policies and procedures, which we believe are critical for fully protecting the public health, and people and businesses directly and indirectly impacted by the Coronavirus National Emergency:

1. Place an immediate moratorium on shut-offs/disconnections of service.
2. Immediately reinstate service, without penalty or reconnection fee, for customers who have been disconnected or had their service suspended.
3. Place an immediate moratorium on late payment fees so that customers aren't accumulating late payment fees that have to be paid back when the crisis is over.
4. Immediately notify customers of the new policies through all available print, email, and online means.

It is **critical** that you take immediate and necessary steps to ensure continued access to utilities and basic services for **all** customers and to prevent those families and businesses from continued hardship.

Thank you for your consideration of this urgent and important request.

Sincerely,

Al Ripley, Director  
Housing, Consumer and Energy Project  
**North Carolina Justice Center**

Karen Bearden, Coordinator  
**350 Triangle**

MaryBe McMillan, President  
**AFL-CIO, North Carolina**

Caitlyn Daas, Energy Democracy Coord.  
**App. Climate Action Collaborative**

Steve Owen, Executive Director  
**Appalachian Inst. for Renewable Energy**

Michelle Myers, NC Field Campaigner  
**Center for Biological Diversity**

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Ken Cook, President  
**Environmental Working Group**

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Lib Hutchby, Eco Committee Co-Chair  
**Womens Int'l League for Peace &  
Freedom**