

September 22, 2020

Dear Pennsylvania General Assembly,

On behalf of the organizations below, we are writing to ask the Pennsylvania General Assembly to allocate \$150 million from the Commonwealth's remaining CARES Act funding to cover the outstanding utility bills of vulnerable Pennsylvania residents and businesses that currently face the threat of having one or more of their utilities shut off.

All told, more than 800,000 Pennsylvanians and 55,000 Pennsylvania businesses are at risk of having one or more utilities shut off during the current pandemic.

While the Public Utility Commission's (PUC) current moratorium on utility shut offs has protected many of the state's most vulnerable consumers and small businesses during this time of crisis, there is growing pressure on the PUC to lift this order. If lifted, hundreds of thousands of the state's residents could be threatened with losing access to critical utilities like electricity, gas, water and internet service during the pandemic.

This could have devastating consequences for state residents who rely on electricity for air conditioning and cooling during the summer heat waves, internet to look for employment, work from home, or children required to do virtually learning, and basic necessities such as water and plumbing.

Sadly, all signs show that the novel coronavirus crisis is far from over. With 123,000 COVID-19 cases in the state and unemployment in Pennsylvania last measured at 10.3%, it appears that it may take a significant amount of time for the damage caused by the pandemic to subside. By protecting Pennsylvanians from utility shut offs, we can do our part to help people weather the storm created by the pandemic and ensuing economic downturn.

Allocating \$150 million from the CARES Act funding not only helps residential ratepayers, it will also help approximately 55,000 Pennsylvania businesses, many of which have had to halt operations during the pandemic and face financial uncertainty. This support is needed to help businesses avoid financial disaster.

The threat of utility shut-offs for hundreds of thousands of Pennsylvanians would send tremors through our economy, threaten the health and safety of residents, and peace of mind for so many vulnerable people in this tenuous time. For these reasons, we call on you to allocate \$150 million from CARES Act funds to protect consumers and businesses from shut offs.

Thank you for your consideration and for your service during this difficult time. We look forward to hearing back from you on this important topic.

Sincerely,

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PennPIRG

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PennEnvironment

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