

Wednesday, March 18, 2020

Submitted via e-mail

Alabama Public Service Commission
Commission President Twinkle Andress Cavanaugh
Commissioner Jeremy H. Oden, Place 1
Commissioner Chris “Chip” Beeker, Place 2
100 North Union Street
P.O. Box 304260
Montgomery, AL 36130

Dear Commissioners,

On behalf of the members of Energy Alabama, Gasp, Cahaba Riverkeeper, Alabama Interfaith Power & Light, Alabama Appleseed, Cahaba River Society, Alabama NAACP, Faith in Action Alabama, Adelante Alabama Worker Center, Alabama Rivers Alliance, Black Warrior Riverkeeper, Birmingham Indivisible, and the Southern Poverty Law Center Action Fund, we urge you to take immediate action to suspend shut-offs and late fees through at least May 1, 2020 for customers who find themselves unable to pay their utility bills during the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19). The Alabama Public Service Commission has a duty to all Alabamians to act immediately.

Relief for consumers is happening piecemeal, if at all, right now. Georgia Power, a sister company of Alabama Power, proactively announced it would suspend residential shutoffs for thirty days, beginning on March 14. On March 15, Spire, the largest gas utility in Alabama, suspended disconnections and late fees until May 1.

We ask you to follow the lead of your peers at the Mississippi Public Service Commission, which on March 15, issued an emergency order suspending all shutoffs for electric, gas, water, and sewer for sixty days. This comprehensive approach is the best way to protect Alabama consumers.

Government bodies have ordered disconnection suspensions statewide in Connecticut, Iowa, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Ohio and Wisconsin. Illinois and West Virginia regulators are “urging” utilities to suspend disconnections, and the Governor of South Carolina is “request[ing] that all regulated utilities and cooperatives ... do not suspend or disconnect essential services.”

We urge the Alabama Public Service Commission to issue an order suspending shutoffs and the accrual of late fees for all regulated electric, gas, water, and telecommunication utilities.

To the extent you are unable to act due to any prohibition by Alabama law, we ask you to clarify those restrictions and publicly call on the Alabama Legislature to remove the barriers to your authority.

Utility companies often emphasize their reliability. The Alabama Public Service Commission has an opportunity to provide that reliability and stability to the people of Alabama during the one of the greatest public health and economic crises of our lifetime.

While we appreciate statements made by Commissioners over the past few days, we do not believe they are sufficient. Case-by-case arrangements and quiet, backroom negotiations are not enough. Alabamians need to know that the official policy in Alabama is that public utilities will not cut-off service or charge late fees for these vital services during an emergency.

Alabamians deserve this security for the duration of this crisis. The time for real action is now.

Regards,

Daniel Tait, Energy Alabama

Michael Hansen, Gasp

Myra Crawford, Cahaba Riverkeeper

Michael Malcom, Alabama Interfaith Power & Light

Carla Crowder, Alabama Appleseed

Beth Stewart, Cahaba River Society

Benard Simelton, Alabama NAACP

Daniel Schwartz, Faith in Action Alabama

Jessica Vosburgh, Adelante Alabama Worker Center

Cindy Lowry, Alabama Rivers Alliance

Charles Scribner, Black Warrior Riverkeeper

Carole Griffin, Birmingham Indivisible

Shay Farley, SPLC Action Fund