

Friday, March 27, 2020

***Submitted via email***

Tennessee Valley Public Power Association (TVPPA)  
% Doug Peters, President, and CEO  
1206 Broad Street  
Chattanooga, TN 37402

Dear Mr. Peters,

On behalf of the members of the undersigned organizations, we urge the Tennessee Valley Public Power Association, Inc (TVPPA) to take action to help suspend service disconnections and late fees at your member utility companies during the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19). In accordance with the principles of public power, TVPPA members have a duty to protect customers by suspending disconnections and waiving late fees during a national crisis, and to reinstate service to those who have recently had their power disconnected.

Across the country, utilities [have already taken steps to protect customers by](#) suspending disconnections and late fees during this pandemic.<sup>1</sup> This list includes several local power companies in TVA's seven-state service territory, including Memphis Light, Gas & Water (MLGW), Knoxville Utilities Board (KUB), Electric Power Board of Chattanooga (EPB), Nashville Electric Service (NES), and Huntsville Utilities. Unfortunately, many public power utilities, including some members of TVPPA, have either failed to act at all or are still charging customers late fees and have potentially already cut off services for non-payments.

On Thursday, March 26th, the TVA [authorized](#) up to a total of \$1 billion of credit support available to local power companies through the deferral of wholesale power payments based on the needs of individual local power companies.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the American Public Power Association has [advocated](#) for increased federal funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) to assist its members with likely increases in late or missed payments from customers.<sup>3</sup> And, legislation approved by the Senate [includes](#) \$900 million in LIHEAP support that will help low-income customers heat and cool their homes.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.energyandpolicy.org/utilities-disconnect-coronavirus/>

<sup>2</sup> See: <https://www.snl.com/Cache/IRCache/c870b6e7-9d66-42ad-b5ef-32606b5a15db.PDF>

<sup>3</sup> See:

<https://www.publicpower.org/periodical/article/appa-others-urge-white-house-congress-consider-bond-provisions-coronavirus>

<sup>4</sup> See: <https://www.ncsl.org/ncsl-in-dc/publications-and-resources/coronavirus-stimulus-bill-states.aspx>

As the COVID infection rate and economic fallout caused by the virus continues to grow, residents in the Tennessee Valley face the compounding crises of sickness and severe reduction or loss of income. Further, school closures throughout the Valley have resulted in home learning schedules for many families, making uninterrupted energy service a critical resource for children in our region.

Disconnecting electricity is a risk to public health. Local governments and health professionals have instituted mandates requiring residents to “shelter-in-place” or stay home. If customers lose power while abiding by local guidelines, they are more likely to move in with family or friends, potentially exacerbating the spread of COVID-19.

Suspending disconnections is an important measure, but this step alone is not sufficient for responding to the needs of Tennessee Valley communities during this pandemic. Current estimates of unemployment are staggering and may reach over 30%, [according](#) to the president of the St. Louis Federal Reserve.<sup>5</sup> TVPPA members should not add late fees onto the monthly bills of thousands of our fellow citizens' who, through no fault of their own, find themselves out of work or with reduced incomes for the foreseeable future.

***We urge the TVPPA to issue public guidance to its members and request a suspension of disconnections and late fees and reinstated power for those who have recently been disconnected.***

With TVA's support and federal funding likely, TVPPA members have every reason to act now to suspend disconnections and late fees and reinstate power for those who have recently been disconnected.

Electricity is not a luxury, it is a necessity to be safe and secure in one's home - especially during a global health crisis. Suspending disconnections and late fees is the right thing to do. It is also in the tradition of public power to do the right thing for the communities they serve. We urge you to tell your member utilities to take advantage of the credit opportunity TVA has made available, suspend cutoffs and late fees, and alleviate stress and strain for many who are already struggling.

Thank you for your immediate attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

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<sup>5</sup> See: <https://qz.com/1823251/coronavirus-could-leave-30-percent-of-us-workers-jobless-fed-pres-says/>

Bill Moll, Conservation Chair, The Tennessee Chapter of Sierra Club

Daniel Tait, Chief Operations Officer, Energy Alabama

Michael Hansen, Executive Director, Gasp

Brianna Knisley, Tennessee Campaign Coordinator, Appalachian Voices

Amanda Garcia, Managing Attorney, Tennessee Office of Southern Environmental Law Center

Shiva Patel, Energy Justice Campaigner, Center for Biological Diversity

Ann League, Executive Director, Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment

Cindy Lowry, Executive Director, Alabama Rivers Alliance

Rev Michael Malcom, Executive Director, Alabama Interfaith Power and Light

Jessica Vosburgh, Executive & Legal Director, Adelante Alabama Worker Center

Duffy-Marie Arnoult & Vance LaVelle, Co-Chairs, The Climate Reality Project: Memphis and Mid-South Regional Chapter

Tonia Brookman, Director, Woodland Community Land Trust

Rev. Jim Sessions, Interfaith Worker Justice of East Tennessee

Daniel Joranko, Convener, Climate Nashville Coalition & Coordinator, Tennessee Interfaith Power and Light

Eli Stanfield, Co-Chair, Jobs with Justice of East Tennessee

(additional signees will be added periodically)