

The North Carolina Utility Commission via Email

March 25, 2021

Dear Members of the NC Utility Commission:

We very much appreciate your Order of February 23, 2021, creating new and more beneficial protections for utility customers facing utility disconnection during the COVID-19 pandemic. With the Order expiring March 31, 2021, we write to urge you to adopt a new Order.

While we still believe that the Commission and the Governor should institute broad Utility Disconnection Moratoriums, absent that, we urge you to consider alternatives like the laudable steps taken by Duke Energy and DHHS, announced on February 11, 2021, expanding provisions of the Winter Moratorium utilizing data sharing.

The Commission could build upon its Order of February 23, 2021, by extending the Winter Moratorium from March 31, 2021 to June 30, 2021, and requiring regulated utilities to enter into data sharing agreements with DHHS and NCORR. This would enable utilities to automatically extend shutoff protections to LIEAP, CIP and NC HOPE **applicants and recipients**, thereby more efficiently directing protections to people who are financially vulnerable.

Despite the best efforts of the NC HOPE program and utilities within your jurisdiction, our organizations are directly aware of continued problems distributing COVID-19 related Utility Assistance, and instances of customers not being offered mandated repayment plans. Millions of dollars of Federal assistance remain to be distributed. Even though COVID-19 vaccination rates are increasing, nevertheless, we still face a health emergency, and have hundreds of thousands of customers who are struggling financially and are behind on their utility bills. Protecting customers', and the public health, necessitates access to utilities and the benefit of effective and enforced disconnection moratorium.

Thank you for your time and attention to these matters.

Sincerely:

Rick Glazier

Executive Director of the North Carolina Justice Center

George Hausen

Executive Director of Legal Aid of North Carolina

Alfred Ripley

Housing, Consumer, and Energy Project Director, North Carolina Justice Center