



October 13, 2015

Chairperson Margaret Curran  
Rhode Island Public Utilities Commission  
89 Jefferson Boulevard  
Warwick, Rhode Island 02888

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Dear Honorable Commissioners:

The George Wiley Center respectfully requests that the Rhode Island Public Utilities Commission institute an emergency regulation through the end of the calendar year, to allow restoration of service or to avoid termination for low-income utility customers in Rhode Island, in order to provide necessary utility service and safeguard public health as the cold season approaches.

Specifically, we suggest that residential customers would be able to restore service or avoid disconnection with a 10% down payment and an agreement for the remaining balance to be repaid over 36 months. Every week the George Wiley Center hears from dozens of Rhode Islanders who have had their utility service terminated or are facing termination. We know the positive impact an affordable down payment can have in economically struggling households, allowing access to the basic needs of electricity and heat. Conversely, we see the negative consequences of unrealistically high down payments that many simply are unable to afford, where families are then left with the crisis of living without utility service. Furthermore, with higher down payment requirements, limited federal LIHEAP funds are more quickly depleted by customers who need crisis grants, lowering the amount of LIHEAP funds available to other grant recipients. It is also important to note that previously adopted emergency restoration rules have included barriers to households that were in a similar economic predicament in previous years. We strongly recommend the Commission avoid such language that would prohibit or limit eligibility based on previous enrollment, essentially penalizing those who are burdened with extended economic instability.

At a time when there remain many challenges in the Rhode Island economy, including high unemployment and stagnant wages, we ask that you consider these circumstances in implementing emergency restoration rules for utility service. As the cold weather approaches, we encourage the Commission to act on behalf of our families and neighbors, to enable dignity, health, and survival during the harsh conditions of the winter when utility service is so vitally needed.

Thank you for your timely consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Henry Shelton, Director  
George Wiley Center

Camilo Viveiros, Lead Organizer  
George Wiley Center

