



August 16, 2016

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

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PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

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Dear Honorable Commissioners:

The George Wiley Center requests that the Rhode Island Public Utilities Commission institute a year-round emergency regulation allowing utility consumers to have service restored after termination, with 10% down payment of total amount owed. Legislative changes made this year to Rhode Island's utility arrearage management program, the Henry Shelton Act (HSA), include eliminating the opportunity for utility consumers to pay 10% down for service restoration. The revised version of the HSA begins on September 1st, 2016, so it is important that the PUC instate a year-round 10% down option that would assure consumers have access to consistent utility service.

It is indeed an emergency throughout the entire year when utility service is shut off to thousands of RI households, leaving people to struggle without heat, light, refrigeration, food preparation, warm water, fans, cooling, communication, electronic medical devices, and all the other basic needs utility service provides. Over 26,000 gas and electric utility service terminations were imposed in 2015, an unacceptably high number for our small state. We are requesting emergency regulation changes be implemented on September 1st, 2016 to offer more affordable access to service restoration and to avoid termination for utility consumers in Rhode Island, to provide necessary utility service and safeguard public health as the cold season approaches.

Specifically, we suggest that residential utility customers be able to restore service or avoid disconnection with a 10% down payment of the total owed, and an agreement for the remaining balance to be repaid over 36 months. As a group with decades of focus on utility advocacy and organizing, every week the George Wiley Center hears from too many Rhode Islanders who have had 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.

Thank you for your timely consideration of this request. We appreciate your leadership in assuring that utility consumers are afforded just and equitable plans on an ongoing year-round basis. As the cold weather approaches, we encourage the Commission to act on behalf of our families and neighbors, to enable dignity, health, and survival when utility service is so vitally needed during the harsh conditions of winter and beyond. We ask that you consider these circumstances in implementing emergency restoration rules for utility service, as we continue to work toward longer term solutions to offer affordable utility service for all Rhode Islanders.

Sincerely,

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September 2nd, 2016

Dear Rhode Island Public Utilities Commissioners,

The George Wiley Center has recently submitted a request for Emergency Regulations, to allow a more affordable down payment of 10% for utility restoration, so our neighbors and families can survive with the basic needs of heat, light and electricity. We are concerned individuals and organizations who know the positive impact your decision could have in our state, and we urge you to act as soon as possible, to implement these important Emergency Regulations in September 2016.

Please support utility restoration rules that will keep Rhode Islanders warm this winter and allow for consistent and reliable utility service year-round.

Rhode Island based organizations:

Against Racism in Medicine, Student Group at Brown Medical School
Alliance for Better Long Term Care
Direct Action for Rights and Equality
Economic Progress Institute
Housing Hotline, Newport, RI
Mental Health Recovery Coalition of Rhode Island
NAACP Providence Branch
Progreso Latino, Central Falls, RI
Providence Student Union
Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless
Rhode Island Community Action Association
Rhode Island Interfaith Coalition to Reduce Poverty
Rhode Island Medical-Legal Partnership
Rhode Island Organizing Project
Tenant and Homeowner Association
Westbay Community Action
White Noise Collective

Rhode Island residents:

RI State Representative Joe Almeida, District 12, Providence
RI State Representative David A. Bennett, District 20, Warwick
Julio Alicea, Providence, RI
Elena M. Almonte
Rev. Dr. David A. Ames, All Saints' Memorial Church, Providence, RI
Neftali Aponte, East Providence, RI
Lissette Arroyo, Central Falls, RI
Kate Aubin, Cranston, RI

Kathe Beaver, Cranston, RI
Neville Bedford, Providence, RI
Ed Benson, Pawtucket, RI
Lori Bettencourt, Community Health Worker/Peer Navigator, Communities of Care Program,
Rhode Island Parent Information Network
Carrie Blanton, Westerly, RI
Peter Bortolotti, Providence, RI
Mary & Andre Bouley, Pawtucket, RI
Shante Brown
Deborah Catone, Wakefield, RI
John Cavaliere, Warwick, RI
Chloe Chassaing, Barrington, RI
Debbie Clark, Warwick, RI
Catherine Collette, Charlestown, RI
Mary Conlon, Pawtucket, RI
Alan Costa, Portsmouth, RI
Joanne Costello, East Greenwich, RI
Heather Cruz
Betsy Dees, Newport County Citizens to End Homelessness
Cidalia DeOliveira, Pawtucket, RI
Kimberly DeShaies, Warwick, RI
Maureen Dunnigan, Pawtucket, RI
Gail Faris, South Kingstown, RI
Lynn K. Finocchiaro, LICSW, North Kingstown, RI
Betsy Florin, Providence, RI
Patricia J. Fontes, Hopkinton, RI
Deya Garcia
Ellen Goodman, Riverside, RI
Dorcas Haller, Providence, RI
Rev. David L. Helfer, Narragansett, RI
Jeanie Herzog, Warm Center, Westerly, RI
Janet Isserlis, Providence, RI
Marie Henedy, East Greenwich, RI
Jeanie Herzog, Westerly, RI
Celeste Jeffrey, Director of Employment Services, The Institute for the Study & Practice of
Nonviolence, Providence, RI
Pam Jennings, Providence, RI
Cheyenne Johnson
Kate Josephson, Social Worker, Providence, RI
Joyce Katzberg, White Rose Music, Warren, RI
Marga Kempner, Brown University Class of 2016, Providence, RI
Andrew Konnerth, Providence, RI
Jennifer Krueger, Client Services Coordinator, Jonnycake Center, Peace Dale, RI
Joann Leonard, Operations Officer, Alliance for Better Long Term Care, Warwick, RI

Christine Linden, Providence, RI
Bernice Lott, North Kingstown, RI
Darlene Magaw, Community Care Alliance, Woonsocket, RI
Jeanna Marchetti, Johnston, RI
Kearney McDonnell, student, Brown University
Donna McGowan, Central Falls, RI
Paul McNeil, Warwick, RI
Janet Rivard Michaud, Providence, RI
Barbara Monahan, North Kingstown, RI
Querino Montrond, East Providence, RI
Elizabeth Morancy, Portsmouth, RI
Francine Murphy-Brillon, Lincoln, RI
David Norton, Pawtucket, RI
Debbie Oceau
John Paul O'Donnell, Cranston, RI
Andrew Omigie, Cranston, RI
Nancy Paradee, Cumberland, RI
Katya Powell, Barrington, RI
Patrick Pride, Woonsocket, RI
Leeanne Piotrowski, East Providence, RI
Frederic N. Pockar, North Providence, RI
Ubaldo Quintero, Pawtucket, RI
Leigh A. Reposa, LCSW, Narragansett, RI
Dannie Ritchie, MD, MPH, Clinical Assistant, Professor Family Medicine, Brown University, Founder, Community Health Innovations of Rhode Island
Paula Rodrigues, Central Falls, RI
Donna Rodriguez, Cumberland, RI
Maggi and Dale Rogers, Pawtucket, RI
Susan Rohwer & Daniel Rodriguez, Providence, RI
Emidio Rosa, Supervisor, Family Support Center, Community Care Alliance, Woonsocket
Susanna Sharkey
Donna Shaw, Cumberland RI
Phyllis Shorter, Woonsocket, RI
Ysaura Sosa, Cranston, RI
Kevin Stafford, Warwick, RI
Monica Teixeira de Sousa, Cranston, RI
William Thompson, Barrington, RI
Sujenny Tiburcio, Community Health Worker, Neighborhood Health Plan of RI
David Turner, disabled individual, Chepachet, RI
Christine Torres, Pawtucket, RI
Laura Ucik, Providence, RI
Megan Wales, Westerly, RI
Ellie Wyatt, Providence, RI