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## KEEP RESIDENTIAL UTILITY SERVICE ON DURING THE CRISIS

Access to affordable electric, gas, water, sewer, and telecommunications (including internet) services is essential at all times, but especially during a worldwide pandemic and shelter-at-home orders. Throughout the COVID-19 emergency, states should take the following steps to ensure that consumers stay connected to essential utility networks and reduce the need for public interaction:

- Issue an emergency declaration through gubernatorial action banning all regulated and unregulated utility service shut offs, including electric, gas, water/sewer, and telecommunications services, due to inability to pay, during the crisis;
- Order all regulated and unregulated utilities to reconnect customers who were previously disconnected due to inability to pay;
- Ban all in-person marketing and sales of alternative energy supply and distributed energy products during the length of the emergency declaration;
- Encourage low-income households to apply for the federal Lifeline phone and broadband program for free or discounted voice and data service; and
- Adjust state Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) application deadlines, enrollment access and eligibility certification processes.

## ENSURING THAT UTILITY SERVICE IS AFFORDABLE FOR ALL

After emergency orders have been lifted, states should ensure that utility arrearages incurred during the crisis do not trigger disconnections. States should require all utility service providers, both regulated and unregulated, to adopt more flexible credit and collections practices than currently required by state regulations and unregulated utility policies. Such protections should:

- Eliminate any customer deposit requirements;
- Eliminate down payment requirements on deferred payment arrangements (DPAs);
- Allow flexible, reasonable DPAs that are based on the customer's ability to pay;
- Eliminate any requirement that disconnected customers pay the full arrearage in order to reconnect, thereby permitting reconnection upon issuance of an affordable DPA;
- Eliminate minimum balance requirements for prepaid utility service customers;
- Require utilities to write off debt for consumers who certify that they are eligible for LIHEAP, but are unable to receive LIHEAP due to insufficient LIHEAP funds; and
- Prohibit utilities from imposing late fees and engaging in negative credit reporting

**Questions? Contact National Consumer Law Center advocates Jen Bosco ([jbosco@nclc.org](mailto:jbosco@nclc.org)), Charlie Harak ([charak@nclc.org](mailto:charak@nclc.org)), John Howat ([jhowat@nclc.org](mailto:jhowat@nclc.org)), Karen Lusson ([klusson@nclc.org](mailto:klusson@nclc.org)) or Olivia Wein ([owein@nclc.org](mailto:owein@nclc.org)).**