

Antonia Hover

From: Office of Commissioner Brown
Sent: Tuesday, September 29, 2020 4:51 PM
To: Commissioner Correspondence
Subject: FW: Letter to PSC on Disconnects
Attachments: Rep. Eskamani PSC Disconnects.pdf

Afternoon,

Please add the attached letter and email to Docket No. 20200219-EI -- Petition to initiate emergency rulemaking to prevent electric utility shutoffs, by League of United Latin American Citizens, Zoraida Santana, and Jesse Moody.

Thank you,

Jennifer Brownfield
Executive Assistant to Commissioner Julie I. Brown
Florida Public Service Commission
2540 Shumard Oak Blvd.
Tallahassee, FL 32399
(850) 413-6030

From: Eskamani, Anna [mailto:Anna.Eskamani@myfloridahouse.gov]
Sent: Tuesday, September 29, 2020 3:24 PM
To: Office of Commissioner Polmann; Office of Commissioner Graham; Office of Chairman Clark; Office of Commissioner Brown; Office of Commissioner Fay
Cc: Records Clerk
Subject: Letter to PSC on Disconnects

Dear Commissioners,

Please see my attached letter in reference to utility disconnects. Thank you!

Rep. Eskamani

Representative Anna V. Eskamani
Florida State House District 47
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Pronouns: She/Her/Hers



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September 29, 2020

Chairman Gary F. Clark
Florida Public Service Commission
2540 Shumard Oak Boulevard
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0850
Commissioner.Clark@psc.state.fl.us
clerk@psc.state.fl.us

RE: Comments entered on Docket 20200219-EI

Dear Florida Public Service Commission Chairman Gary Clark:

On July 29, 2020, the Florida Public Service Commission (PSC) held a workshop on the impacts the COVID-19 pandemic has had on Florida's utilities. Here representatives from the State's largest regulated utilities informed regulators that hundreds of thousands of Florida residents are falling behind on their utility payments and may be subject to large overdue bills. Many of these bills exceed 90 days of non-payment, representing millions of dollars in outstanding payments looming over Florida's families.

Several investor-owned utilities, including Duke Energy Florida, Tampa Electric Company, and Florida Power & Light Co. have indicated that they are starting to disconnect customers for non-payment of utility bills. Given the ongoing emergency, I join others in asking that you order the investor-owned utilities to suspend disconnections for 90 days in line with the Petition submitted by the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) in Docket No. 20200219-EI.

The options and programs Florida's utilities have proposed for customers struggling to get by amid the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated economic and social impacts are insufficient, especially in light of the failure of the U.S. Congress to pass another round of coronavirus relief. Florida is still experiencing thousands of new cases of COVID-19 every day, and at the time of this writing, the State has exceeded 14,000 COVID-19 related deaths. Our economy and our residents will need time to recover from the impacts of the pandemic. The State of



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Florida needs strong state-level leadership from responsible institutions to protect Florida's residents and families health, safety, and economic well-being. Now is the time for action.

I support LULAC's Petition seeking a 90-day moratorium on disconnections, and submit the following additional recommendations for consideration:

- 1. The PSC should identify and implement additional avenues to order** Florida utilities to extend stays or reinstate stays on disconnections through June 1, 2021 at the earliest.
- 2. The PSC should mandate utilities to reconnect customers disconnected from power from March 9, 2020 through the present, especially residential households.**

While we call for forward-looking protections, we cannot ignore that the gears of disconnections have already begun to turn in some parts of our state. To ensure that protective measures do not leave any customers behind, we call on the PSC to recommend that utilities reconnect any previously disconnected customers, especially residential households, dating back to the beginning of the state of emergency. Some customers will have moved or left service territories, but utilities should at least send notice that reconnection without fee and enrollment in a balance management plan is available.

- 3. The PSC should mandate utilities to waive fees and fines for customers through June 1, 2021.**

Punitive measures to ensure compliance are inappropriate during the present crisis. Utilities should suspend fines that they normally charge for late payment, return payment, credit or debit card payment, and service reconnection until the State has achieved a full recovery.

- 4. The Commission should open a docket that covers both utilities' and customers' financial challenges arising due to COVID-19, and in particular, should hold additional workshops centered on the experiences and needs of vulnerable ratepayers, community stakeholders, and utility customers impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.**

The July 29, 2020 workshop on COVID-19 impacts to utilities did not allow for public comment. As a result, crucial voices have been left out of the conversation. The PSC has not consulted with anyone who can credibly speak specifically on behalf of the low income, Black, Latino, and Indigenous communities that have been most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. These communities face burdens and barriers to



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participation in programs that PSC members and staff must take into consideration. The customers themselves are the ones best suited to determine whether utility programs are sufficient to meet their needs.

5. The PSC should urge utilities to extend debt forgiveness to households facing unemployment, ALICE constrained households, and energy-debt burdened households.

Residents seeking assistance with their bills have found that available support falls into two general categories: deferment through repayment plans and third-party agency bill assistance. For residents struggling under the current economic crisis, deferment is not relief, and the limited availability of funds means that many residents will never see relief from third-party bill assistance. Direct bill forgiveness is necessary to the survival of households experiencing unemployment, ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained but Employed) households, and low-income energy burdened households (households that pay over 6% of their income on utilities). The PSC should do everything within its power to strongly urge utilities to pass savings and profits on to residential customers in the form of debt forgiveness. Such practices are a moral imperative at this time. The PSC should send a clear message that they will view such programs as strong evidence of prudent customer debt management practices.

6. The PSC should establish and strongly recommend guidelines for utility balance management programs (alternatively referred to as “arrearage management programs”) that meet Floridians’ needs based on best practices established in other parts of the country.

Balance Management Programs should not impose up-front costs, should automatically enroll eligible customers, should allow for sufficient time-frames to ensure customers do not become energy-burdened, and should include a debt forgiveness element for participating customers. We provide additional details on best practices identified in other states in Attachment A.

7. The PSC should require utilities to share additional data beyond that which was disclosed at the July 29 PSC workshop and should require utilities to provide updated data related to the COVID-19 crisis every month.

The information offered by utilities at the July 29 meeting was well appreciated, but was not sufficient and will quickly become outdated without further updates. We provide additional details regarding the



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information both the public and our elected officials need to engage in responsible decision-making in Attachment B.

8. The PSC should mandate utilities to set robust energy efficiency goals and programs, specifically those aimed at assisting low-income customers.

For many years, Florida's largest utilities have under-invested in low income energy-efficiency programs critical to addressing the pervasive high energy burden so many Florida families face. The result of this long-standing failure to adequately invest in these programs has played a major contributing role in deepening the utility debt crisis we are encountering today. The PSC should recognize this and insist that utilities establish robust energy efficiency programs.

I urge the Florida Public Service Commission to consider and adopt these recommendations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anna".

Representative Anna V. Eskamani

Florida House of Representatives, District 47