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June 11, 2020

**EMAIL DELIVERY**

The Honorable Bill Ferguson  
President of the Senate  
H-107 State House  
Annapolis, MD. 21401

**Re: *Maryland Residential Utility Customers and Federal and State Assistance***

Dear President Ferguson:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Maryland residential consumers of utility and communications services regulated by the Maryland Public Service Commission. As you know, the Office of People's Counsel serves as an advocate regarding utility services, affordability and other issues of great importance to Maryland residential utility customers across the State.

I am writing to you for two reasons. First, I want to inform you of correspondence I have sent to each member of the Maryland Congressional delegation urging federal action related to utility and communications services. The priority is bill assistance support for essential gas and electric services, which could be provided through supplemental LIHEAP funding or other funding mechanisms. While I appreciate the \$19 million in supplemental LIHEAP funding in the stimulus package, this will not be adequate funding for the continuing health and economic crisis or for the extended recovery thereafter. I have attached a sample copy of the Congressional letter sent by me, as well as a Resolution and Congressional letter from my national organization the National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates (NASUCA).

Second, I am very concerned about the aftermath of the State of Emergency in Maryland, as it relates to maintenance of essential utility services to our Maryland households. I am very appreciative of Governor Hogan's quick action in mid-March in issuing an Executive Order prohibiting disconnection of gas, electric, water, phone,

internet and cable services during the State of Emergency, and his extension of those moratoria through July 1. Many utility and communications companies also voluntarily adopted suspensions of service disconnections. These suspensions have been essential during this unprecedented health and economic emergency. However, once the Maryland State of Emergency ends, there will be no official prohibition on service disconnections.

We all know that the problems of income loss and bill payment difficulties will continue through 2020 and beyond, and these pose a threat to maintenance of utility and communications services. Senior citizens, seriously ill and immune-compromised people, low-income and newly under and unemployed residents will remain at risk as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. The health and economic crisis has affected all areas of the State, although in different ways. However, the importance of maintaining essential services is a common need for every Maryland household. Furthermore, the issue of gas and electric service disconnections is directly related to other COVID-19 related impacts on rental housing, health, education and other issues of concern to Maryland residents.

On behalf of Maryland's residential utility customers, I ask that you consider policy priorities related to maintenance of utility and communications services as our State addresses the financial impacts of the COVID-19 crisis.

Please know that the Office of People's Counsel continues to provide updated information on utility services and policies, energy assistance and other resources at [www.opc.maryland.gov](http://www.opc.maryland.gov) and through our agency distribution network, and offers information and assistance to individual consumers. We also are in the processing of providing information on DHS energy assistance and SNAP programs through food delivery networks in the State, to encourage eligible households, including the newly eligible, to take advantage of currently available assistance.

Thank you for your continued efforts on behalf of Maryland residents, and for consideration of these concerns. Please contact me if you have any questions or wish to discuss these issues further.

Sincerely,

**/s/ Paula M. Carmody**

Paula M. Carmody

People's Counsel

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PMC

Attachments (3)