



SeniorLAW Center

Protecting the Rights of Older Pennsylvanians

July 15, 2020

Via electronic mail

The Honorable Gladys Brown Dutrieuille, Chairman
The Honorable David W. Sweet, Vice Chairman
The Honorable John F. Coleman, Commissioner
The Honorable Ralph V. Yanora, Commissioner
Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission
Commonwealth Keystone Building
400 North Street, 3rd Floor
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17120

Re: Emergency Termination Protections Remain Essential to Public Health

Dear Chairman, Vice Chairman, and Commissioners:

SeniorLAW Center seeks justice for older Pennsylvanians through legal representation, education and advocacy, serving over 10,000 older people each year in all 67 counties of Pennsylvania with our free legal, education and advocacy services. We submit this letter to voice our strong opposition to the Energy Association of Pennsylvania (EAP) request that the Commission end the current prohibition on utility service termination, established in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Permitting shut offs now will result in catastrophic harm and will imperil the lives of Pennsylvania's most vulnerable citizens, especially older Pennsylvanians who are at the epicenter of the pandemic.

Across Pennsylvania and the world, older people are the most at risk to COVID-19 and most likely to die. Those who are frail and/or with underlying health conditions continue to be at enormous risk of the virus and need to continue to shelter at home during this phase of the crisis. Older people are also highly vulnerable to soaring heat during the current summer months, most with no access to senior centers or cooling venues due to the pandemic. In brief, the pandemic crisis is not over for those we serve or for our Commonwealth.

We join the excellent arguments made by our colleagues at Community Legal Services and Pennsylvania Utility Law Project in their letter of July 14, 2020. **Lifting the moratorium on August 1 will exacerbate the public health crisis**, and will not improve access to or availability of assistance. We also agree that the Commission must institute a statewide proceeding to develop a strategic, unified plan to equitably resolve the mounting utility debt crisis. We also have great concerns about notice, communications, due process, access to low-income programs, and the humanitarian crisis that homelessness will create during a global health crisis.

As you know, Governor Wolf recently extended the prohibitions on evictions and foreclosures until August 31, 2020 to protect vulnerable Pennsylvanians from being removed from their homes during the pandemic. These protections are extremely important to the health, safety and security of the seniors of Pennsylvania. However,

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should protections from utility termination be removed, many Pennsylvanians will be effectively made homeless from the loss of utility services, and will be forced to seek shelter with loved ones or in congregate emergency shelter. Needless to say, congregate shelter has been deadly for older people. Both of these situations would exacerbate the public health crisis, putting our communities at greater risk of exposure to COVID-19, and further burdening Pennsylvania's already overextended economy and health system.

Just last week our attorneys helped an elderly tenant get her electricity restored quickly because of the moratorium. Our client is a disabled senior citizen who uses a wheelchair and a service dog. The electricity had been shut off in her apartment, and she was spending all her time in her building's basement because the power was on down there. The basement has no working bathroom, so she was having to use a bucket to relieve herself. We were able to get her electricity turned on the same day she called, and she was able to move back up to her apartment right away because of the moratorium. We are working with her now to determine why, despite paying her bills in a timely matter and living in her apartment for years, a balance from another address was added to her account and helping her to resolve the issue. She is exactly the type of consumer who will be at risk if the moratorium is lifted.

The homes of older people are often intergenerational, affecting all ends of the life spectrum. Over 100,000 children are being raised by their grandparents in Pennsylvania, at a time of school and recreational closures, uncertain next steps, familial strain. Join us in helping to support these families, not cause further strife and stress.

We are grateful for your leadership and consideration of the urgent needs of older Pennsylvanians, vulnerable individuals and families during these unprecedented times.

Very truly yours,



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