

KATHERINE GILMORE RICHARDSON
COUNCILMEMBER, AT-LARGE

CITY HALL, ROOM 581
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19107
PHONE: 215-686-0454 or 0455
www.phlcouncil.com/KatherineGilmoreRichardson/



CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEES

Chair
Environment

Member

Commerce & Economic Development
Housing, Neighborhood Development & the Homeless
People with Disabilities & Special Needs
Global Opportunities & Creative Economy
Streets & Services
Licenses & Inspections
Labor & Civil Service

VIA EMAIL

Tuesday, February 16, 2021

Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission
400 North Street
Keystone Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Chairman Dutrieuille,

I am writing to the Commission today to ask you to extend the moratorium on utility shutoffs until there is a plan in place to equitably address utility debt. With the COVID-19 pandemic still affecting so many Philadelphians, I urge the Commission to construct a meaningful plan that will help us protect the wellbeing of our most vulnerable during these trying times.

Utility shutoffs are a threat to public health and safety. More than 847,000 Pennsylvania households are currently at risk of utility shutoff. Residential utility customers in the Commonwealth owe over \$811 million, which is up 64% from last year. This debt negatively impacts both customers and businesses. Utility companies have worked hard to promote assistance programs and create customer payment plans, but they have seen lower rates of enrollment. This situation puts everyone in a challenging position, and it is imperative that the PUC extend the current protections for customers until a plan is developed to equitably manage debt and implement additional utility assistance grants from Harrisburg.

As you are aware, Covid-19 has caused sudden and unpredictable economic hardship for millions of Americans. As of December 2020, over 230,000 Philadelphians had filed for unemployment. Energy insecurity was already a significant challenge in Philadelphia before the pandemic: Residents below thirty percent of the area median income pay twenty-three percent of their income to utilities; more than half of African-American households, regardless of income, experience energy insecurity at least once per year; and forty percent of renters experience energy insecurity at least once per year. In addition to making economic sense to provide extra support for customers during these challenging times, it is also beneficial in our attempts to protect public health and reduce housing insecurity.

While ensuring the health and safety of our communities must remain the primary priority, I am also aware of the challenging position faced by our utility companies, especially Philadelphia's municipally owned gas utility, Philadelphia Gas Works. The longer utility debt piles up, the more uncertain we are of how that debt will impact future rate cases, system maintenance, and our workforce. It is my sincere hope that the PUC will step in to work with utilities to help develop equitable plans that address debt without the threat of shutoff. I appreciate the way Philadelphia's utility companies have worked diligently throughout this pandemic to enroll eligible customers in assistance programs.

I hope you can identify a date to lift the shutoff moratorium that balances all of these complicated needs. I eagerly await your response and look forward to hearing your plan to help avert this potential crisis.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Katherine Gilmore Richardson".

Katherine Gilmore Richardson
Councilmember At-Large

cc: David W. Sweet, Commissioner, Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission
John F. Coleman, Jr. Commissioner, Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission
Ralph V. Yanora, Commissioner, Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission