STATE AFFAIRS
WISPOLITICS
Wisconsin's Premier Political News Service

Public Service Commission: State moratorium on utility disconnections to end April 15, 2021

Posted on Thursday, Mar 18, 2021

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. Get the app or access via desktop.

MADISON – On Thursday, the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (PSC) voted unanimously to allow utilities to move forward with disconnection of service for nonpayment at the end of the annual winter moratorium after April 15, 2021. The action comes following a moratorium preventing utilities from disconnecting service for nonpayment during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Since the end of October, the weekly average of COVID-19 cases have decreased by more than 90% and Wisconsin has become a national leader in vaccine implementation. Customers who are behind on paying their utility bills are encouraged to arrange a payment plan with their utility providers and seek bill payment assistance before the moratorium ends.

"Our challenge during this pandemic has been to balance public health with the ability of utilities to continue to provide safe and reliable service. We are successfully doing that," said PSC Chairperson Rebecca Cameron Valcq. "I encourage all who are behind in their utility bills to contact their utility and work out a payment plan, and for those who are struggling to pay, to seek out available public assistance funds."

On March 24, 2020, the PSC met and ordered utilities to maintain service to customers during the pandemic. At that same time, the PSC provided financial support for utilities to ensure they could remain financially healthy to enable the continued delivery of safe and reliable gas, electric, and water service. Throughout the summer and early fall, the PSC met several times to review the status of the pandemic and its March 2020 decisions. In October on a 2-1 vote, the PSC decided to extend the disconnection moratorium for residential utility customers through the end of the annual winter moratorium, which runs from November 1 through April 15.

Last year, the PSC worked closely with the Department of Administration's Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program (WHEAP) and utilities to ensure energy assistance and crisis funding was available, including an additional $8 million in Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) crisis funds that were available through the federal CARES Act, to qualifying households to help manage heating season energy costs and, in the case of crisis funds, decrease customers' arrears.

To avoid disconnection, customers who have fallen behind on payments are encouraged first to contact their utility to set up a payment plan. If customers are having difficulty paying their energy bills, they may be eligible for assistance from the WHEAP. To apply online go to energybenefit.wi.gov or to apply by phone call 1-800-506-5596, or go to http://homeenergyplus.wi.gov to find out where to apply in person or call 1-866-HEATWIS.

In addition to the funding annually available through WHEAP, several additional utility bill assistance programs are expected to become available to Wisconsinites in the near term.

As part of federal stimulus funding from the 2021 Consolidated Appropriations Act, Governor Evers announced more than $322 million in funding available for Wisconsinites under the Wisconsin Emergency Rental Assistance Program, administered by the Department of Administration. This program provides direct financial assistance for rent, utility, home energy costs, and wraparound services for individuals who qualify. The same stimulus package included $638 million nationwide for additional dedicated water bill assistance, and a portion of that is anticipated to be made available to Wisconsin as well.

Under the new 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, Wisconsin is also anticipated to receive an additional infusion of LIHEAP funds to its WHEAP program, along with additional emergency rental, utility bill, water bill, and homeowner assistance.

Utilities are required to offer a Deferred Payment Agreement (DPA) to residential customers who cannot pay an outstanding bill in full. If customers cannot reach a payment agreement with their utility, they may contact the PSC by calling 1-800-225-7729, or by filing a complaint on the PSC website.

For more information about utility disconnections and collections, see the PSC's fact sheet on residential customer rights.