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New bill would hold Ameren accountable for outages

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By Diane Wilkins, Marion Daily Republican, wilkins@mariondaily.com

SPRINGFIELD - State Rep. John Bradley, D-Marion, has joined several downstate lawmakers, representatives of AARP Illinois and the Citizens Utility Board to announce new legislation filed in the Illinois House to require that most downstate electricity customers be compensated by their utility company for extended power outages of a preventable nature.

"This legislation will provide downstate consumers with the same right to compensation as it exists for power customers in Northern Illinois," Bradley said. "Power outages can range from inconvenient to life-threatening and whether or not a utility company is held accountable for failing to provide reliable service shouldn't be determined by the region in which someone lives."

Bradley is the chief sponsor of the bill.

Under current law, Commonwealth Edison, the major power supplier in Northern Illinois and the Chicagoland region, is required to compensate customers for damages due to power outages or power surges of four hours or more. To make sure that compensation provision also applies to downstaters, House Bill 5576 requires that electric utilities companies with over 100,000 customers, like Ameren, reimburse their customers for all actual damages due to continued power interruptions of four hours or more if more than 0.8 percent of customers are suffering from the outage.

In addition, the utility companies must compensate any affected municipality, county, or other unit of local government in which the power outage or surge took place. The utility cannot seek to recover its compensation costs through the rates paid by customers.

"Power outages have a particularly harsh effect on the elderly - who are often at home, some with limited mobility, and most living on fixed incomes - to force them to pay for services that they aren't receiving is unfair," said Dean Clough, an AARP member from Rochester who is also an Ameren customer. "This bill helps turn the light on for power companies when it comes to the needs and concerns of their customers - AARP commends Representative Bradley for introducing this bill and continuing to stand up and fight for the consumers of Illinois."

Bryan McDaniel, a representative of the Citizens Utility board is glad to see this legislation being brought up.

"Power outages aren't just annoying—they can be extremely costly, damaging our personal property and our quality of life," sais McDaniel. "If the outage is avoidable, then by all means the power companies ought to pay up and be accountable to consumers."

House Bill 5576 awaits assignment to a substantive committee.

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