



CITIZENS UTILITY BOARD

Fighting for Illinois Consumers

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CUB STATEMENT ON ICC APPROVAL OF COVID-19 UTILITY CUSTOMER PROTECTIONS

CUB applauds the Illinois Commerce Commission's quick action and approval of one of the most comprehensive COVID-19 utility customer relief measures in the country. We talk to utility customers every day at CUB, so we know people are hurting and worried about paying their utility bills—the approval of these protections is a victory for consumers all over the state. We hope some of the measures begin to provide a sense of security and stability as Illinois begins to recover from the pandemic and economic crisis. There's more work to be done to help Illinois families get back on their feet, but these measures are a big step forward.

-- David Kolata, CUB executive director

BACKGROUND:

- The Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) on Thursday approved a comprehensive relief plan for utility customers struggling to pay their bills during the COVID-19 public health and economic crisis.
- The relief plan was developed through two months of negotiations among consumer advocates and Illinois' largest utilities, including CUB.
- In March, on the heels of Gov. J.B. Pritzker's emergency stay-at-home directive, the ICC ordered a moratorium on service shut-offs and late-payment fees for all of Illinois' private, investor-owned utilities. At the same time, state regulators directed utilities to develop revised credit and collection procedures for utility customers. Utilities and consumer advocates then worked together to craft this plan.
- The resulting 30-page agreement includes these consumer protections for customers of Ameren Illinois, Aqua Illinois, ComEd, Illinois American Water, Nicor Gas, North Shore Gas, Peoples Gas and Utilities Inc.:
 - Extension of the ICC moratorium on shut-offs and late-payment fees.
 - Reconnection without fee of all financially strapped utility customers disconnected in the last year for nonpayment.
 - A bill-payment assistance program that offers debt forgiveness for utility customers facing financial hardship.
 - Extended consumer-friendly Deferred Payment Arrangements (DPAs)—utility payment plans that help customers pay off utility debt. DPAs for customers who express financial hardship will not require a down payment and will be extended to 24 months. All other customers will be charged a down payment of no more than 10% of their arrearage, and may select periods up to 18 months to pay it off. (Typically, such plans are no more than 12 months.)

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- Utilities will be required to waive deposits connected to late or nonpayment, arrearages, or credit-related issues for residential customers experiencing financial hardship.
- Utilities will not report late payments and nonpayment for active customers to credit bureaus and reporting agencies.
- Required utility reporting of disconnections and other credit and collections data, by zip code, through August of 2021. Consumer advocates lauded the data-collection requirements, saying they will provide valuable information about which neighborhoods and communities need and are taking advantage of these new credit and collection procedures.

For more information, visit www.CUBHelpCenter.com.

CUB is Illinois' leading nonprofit utility watchdog group. Created by the Illinois Legislature, CUB opened its doors in 1984 to represent the interests of residential and small-business utility customers. Since then, CUB has saved consumers more than \$20 billion by helping to block rate hikes and secure refunds. For more information, call CUB's Consumer Hotline at 1-800-669-5556 or visit CUB's award-winning website, www.CitizensUtilityBoard.org.

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