



CITIZENS UTILITY BOARD

Fighting for Illinois Consumers

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Consumer Advocates to Illinois Utilities: Pause Shut-offs in Storm-ravaged Areas

Consumer advocates on Thursday called on utilities across the state—including Ameren Illinois, Commonwealth Edison, Peoples Gas and Nicor Gas—to issue a moratorium on utility shut-offs and offer special assistance to help residents of areas ravaged by extreme summer weather.

Leaders from a number of advocacy groups, including the Citizens Utility Board (CUB), Blacks In Green (BIG) and Community Organizing & Family Issues (COFI), joined state Rep. La Shawn K. Ford in calling for the moratorium and special assistance. They said even though stormy weather has passed, for now, the costs of the aftermath are ongoing.

"In an emergency like this, utilities need to rise to the occasion and be good corporate citizens," CUB Executive Director Sarah Moskowitz said. "These utilities are incredibly profitable, and they are currently asking for record rate increases. We're urging them to look beyond their bottom lines and stand up for their customers."

"When I speak with impacted residents, I hear how many are struggling to choose between paying their bills and putting food on the table," Rep. Ford said. "Especially for those who are on a fixed income or LIHEAP (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program), we need to show compassion and come together to help get people back on their feet. A brief moratorium will go a long way in helping our neighbors."

Gov. J.B. Prizker this month issued disaster declarations for eight Illinois counties that were hit with severe weather between June 29 and July 4, including high winds, tornadoes and flash flooding. The counties are Cook, Coles, Edgar, Hancock, McDonough, Morgan, Sangamon, and Washington.

Neighborhoods in and around Chicago's West Side, for example, were hit with up to 9 inches of rainfall on July 2, flooding streets and basements. The storm damage has created hardship for people who were already struggling to pay their utility bills before the severe weather came, and now are forced to pay for costly cleanup and repair of their homes.

"The last thing people need after this extreme flooding, when they already face the difficult and expensive clean-up of a home and replacement of lost furniture and other household goods and are still struggling from COVID's aftermath, is to have to worry about the threat of utility disconnections," said Rozalia Grillier, Co-President Emeritus of POWER-PAC IL, the statewide parent-led organization supported by Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI). "We urge the utilities to put themselves in the shoes of their financially struggling customers and keep the power on."

"Right now, a lot of seniors and people on fixed incomes are dealing with their water tanks and furnaces going out due to flooding, and are having to decide between paying to replace these appliances or keep up to date on their utility bills," said Princess Shaw, a community organizer and founder of the nonprofit Light Up Lawndale who has seen the flood damage firsthand. "This utility moratorium would allow residents of these affected neighborhoods the breathing room to recover from the storm."

"We urge utility management to halt utility disconnections for financially struggling customers—particularly during these extreme weather events," said Karen Lusson, Senior Attorney at the National Consumer Law Center. "Utility disconnections make homes uninhabitable, and those who have been impacted by intense flooding are already facing the difficult task of clean-up and restoration of their living spaces."

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In addition to a moratorium on shutoffs, consumer advocates also called on local utilities to offer any other support that would be helpful, including more lenient, consumer-friendly payment plans; more assistance to pay off bills; protecting the status of customers who are on the Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP); and better outreach to storm-damaged areas to educate them about energy efficiency incentives that could help them reduce their energy costs.

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The **Citizens Utility Board (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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