



## FAQ on the PUC's Response to COVID-19

### What is the PUC doing to help Texans experiencing economic hardship due to COVID-19?

On March 26<sup>th</sup>, the Public Utility Commission of Texas responded to the governor's declaration of emergency with a plan to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on Texas utility customers who are experiencing genuine economic hardship as a result of the pandemic.

### Who are these actions intended to help?

These efforts are intended to help those Texans in genuine financial distress as a result of COVID-19, when their utility bills will literally break their family budget. Because the cost of these temporary measures will ultimately be borne by rate payers (including customers with suspended disconnects whose final balances are not totally offset by the COVID-19 surcharge on actively paying customers), they should be reserved for those in dire circumstances.

#### HOW ARE WATER UTILITY CUSTOMERS AFFECTED?

The commission has ordered PUC-regulated water and sewer utilities across the state to immediately suspend disconnections for non-payment.

#### WHAT ABOUT ELECTRICITY CUSTOMERS OUTSIDE THE AREAS OF TEXAS WITH RETAIL COMPETITION?

The PUC has ordered electricity providers outside the ERCOT grid (*namely Entergy, El Paso Electric, SPS and SWEPCO*) to suspend disconnections for non-payment.

*↶ The orders give these PUC-regulated organizations a way to recover the costs of these ↷ suspensions after the crisis subsides through rate increases on their entire customer base.*

#### WHAT ABOUT ELECTRIC CUSTOMERS IN THE AREA OF TEXAS OPEN TO RETAIL COMPETITION?

Under a new program called the **COVID-19 Electricity Relief Plan**, the PUC has ordered Retail Electric Providers (REPs) in areas of the state open to competition to:

- Immediately offer a deferred payment plan to any residential customer who requests one
- Suspend disconnections for residential customers who have been added to the state's unemployment and low income list due to the effects of COVID-19.

### How do I get added to the list?

If you are a residential electricity customer in areas of Texas open to retail competition who qualifies for unemployment benefits and is in genuinely dire economic straits as a result of COVID-19, you can contact the state's Low Income List Administrator (LILA) at **866-454-8387** to request enrollment. Their call center is operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

### How does enrollment work?

After you have called the LILA and shared proof of your unemployment status and essential information with them (*including your name, electricity service address and, preferably, your electricity account number with your REP*), you will be provisionally added to the list and your REP will be notified within a week to not disconnect your power if you are unable to pay the bill or enter into a deferred payment plan with the REP. [NOTE: If your payment is due in the next 10 days, you should contact your REP right away.]



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### **Is that one phone call all I need to do?**

Within 30 days of that call, you'll need to provide documentation of your qualification for unemployment benefits from the Texas Workforce Commission to the LILA so that you can be officially added to the lists.

### **If I am added to the list, what happens?**

Per the PUC order, Retail Electric Providers cannot disconnect electricity for up to six months for customers who have been added to the COVID-19 Electricity Relief Program list because they are unable to pay the bill or enter into a deferred payment plan with the REP.

### **Will I still be billed for my electricity?**

In accordance with your contract, REPs will generate your bill, and you should pay the amount you are able. Your REP will then request assistance with your bill from the Relief Program. If the REP receives assistance from the Relief Program, then your bill will be adjusted by that amount.

### **What about customers of electric co-ops and municipal utilities?**

Operating largely outside of the PUC's jurisdiction, electric co-ops and municipal utilities, like those in Austin and San Antonio, are taking measures they see fit to address the financial impact of the COVID-19 crisis on their customers. If you are one of their customers, you are encouraged to contact them with your questions and concerns.

### **Who is paying for this?**

Electricity still costs money to generate and, along with water, costs money to deliver to your home. If you are a customer protected from disconnection by participation in the Relief Program, whatever costs you are unable to cover will be borne in part by a combination of other paying customers through a new monthly fee, losses absorbed by your retail electric provider, and, eventually you in a deferred payment plan to recover any remaining amounts.

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For more information, including our ongoing response to the COVID-19 crisis, visit

[www.PUC.Texas.gov](http://www.PUC.Texas.gov)