



Public Utility Commission of Texas

1701 N. Congress, P.O. Box 13326, Austin, TX 78711-3326 Fax 512-936-7003

News Release
March 26, 2020

Contact:
Andrew Barlow [512-936-7135]

PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION OF TEXAS ACTS TO MITIGATE COVID-19 IMPACT

Issues guidance on disconnects for non-payment during state of emergency and establishes relief fund

Austin, TX – In today’s open meeting, the Public Utility Commission of Texas responded to Governor Abbott’s declaration of emergency with a series of measures intended to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 hardships on power, water and sewer customers across the state.

“As our state takes appropriately aggressive measures to stem the tide of a disease with outside potential to spread and harm our citizens, we must include provisions to assist families at increased risk of losing power, water and sewer service,” said Chairman Walker. “This approach strikes the appropriate balance of providing immediate assistance to eligible residential customers experiencing COVID-19-related hardship while ensuring the long-term viability of our state’s competitive electricity market.”

After discussing a series of memoranda penned by Chairman DeAnn Walker ([Memo 1](#), [Memo 2](#)), the commissioners voted unanimously to issue orders which will temporarily suspend a series of rules pertaining to the provisions for utility industry participants to disconnect service for non-payment. They also created the COVID-19 Electricity Relief Program, a funding mechanism through which Retail Electric Providers (REPs) may recover a reasonable portion of the cost of providing those uninterrupted services to customers facing financial hardship.

Upon implementation of the order approved by the commissioners, REPs in the ERCOT market must suspend late fees and offer deferred payment plans to residential customers in danger of disconnection. Customers at risk of disconnection because of COVID-19-related unemployment should first contact their Retail Electric Provider to request a deferred payment plan. Information will be forthcoming on how to enroll in the COVID-19 Electricity Relief Program under which service disconnections can be suspended for up to six months.

REPs who forego disconnecting customers certified as experiencing COVID-19-related hardship will be empowered to request reimbursement from the COVID-19 Electricity Relief Program, which will be funded by the proceeds of a 33 cent per megawatt hour charge billed monthly by Transmission and Distribution Utilities. (For a Texas household that typically uses 1,000 kilowatt hours of electricity per month, the charge on their bill would be an additional 33 cents.)



In addition, Texas water and sewer utilities and integrated electric utilities outside of the ERCOT market (specifically Entergy, El Paso Electric, SPS and SWEPCO) whose rates are set by the PUC, may not charge late fees or disconnect customers for non-payment during the emergency.

The relevant order can be read here:

[**ORDER RELATED TO COVID-19 ELECTRICITY RELIEF PROGRAM**](#)

###

About the Public Utility Commission

Our mission is to serve Texans by regulating the state's electric, telecommunication, and water and sewer utilities, implementing respective legislation, and offering customer assistance in resolving consumer complaints. Since its founding in 1975, the Commission has a long and proud history of service to Texas, protecting customers, fostering competition, and promoting high quality infrastructure. To learn more, please visit <http://www.puc.texas.gov>.