



THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC UTILITIES

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March 31, 2020

All Investor-Owned Gas Distribution
Companies Regulated by the Department of
Public Utilities (Exhibit A)

All Investor-Owned Electric Distribution
Companies Regulated by the Department of
Public Utilities (Exhibit B)

All Investor-Owned Water Distribution
Companies Regulated by the Department of
Public Utilities (Exhibit C)

Rebecca Tepper
Massachusetts Attorney General
Office of Ratepayer Advocacy
One Ashburton Place
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National Consumer Law Center
7 Winthrop Sq., 4th Floor
Boston, MA, 02110

Jerrold Oppenheim
Low Income Energy Affordability Network
57 Middle Street
Gloucester, MA 01930

RE: Request for Comments Regarding Best Practices During the Resumption of
Shutoff Activities

Dear All,

On March 24, 2020, the Chairman of the Department of Public Utilities (“Department”) issued the attached order (“Order”) prohibiting investor-owned gas, electric, and water distribution companies (collectively the “Distribution Companies”) from shutting off a customer’s utility service for failure to pay a bill or any portion of a bill. The Order further directed the Distribution Companies not to send communications threatening the shut off utility service to any of their customers for failure to pay a bill or any portion of a bill. This Order remains in place until the state of emergency in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts related to the coronavirus (“COVID-19”) is lifted or further communication is provided by the Department, whichever comes first.

The Department would like to reduce uncertainty around the future financial impact this will have on both customers and Distribution Companies. Specifically, customers who have been unable to pay during the state of emergency should be given a reasonable time period and payment schedule to repay their utility bill. The Department notes the ultimate length of the state of emergency will be taken into account but would propose that customers be given a period of at least twelve months for repayment. However, the Department also would like to ensure that Distribution Companies and other stakeholders have an opportunity to comment. At this time, the Department seeks written comments related to the best practices to implement when shutoff activities resume. These comments should address any issue you believe is relevant, including.

1. Whether categories of customers should be treated differently (e.g., customers who suffered hardship because of COVID-19 or the state of emergency, residential customers v. C&I customers, customers notified prior to the Order of a potential shut off for non-payment);
2. The procedures to notify a customer of a potential shutoff after shutoff activities are allowed to resume;
3. A potential suspension of late payment fees;
4. The type of payment plans that should be offered to customers;
5. Communications to ensure that customers know they are responsible to pay for the utility services they use while shutoffs are prohibited; and
6. The appropriate process to consider ratemaking methodology to consider the Distribution Companies management and collection of associated arrearage dollars and bad debt write offs related the state of emergency.

Comments should be emailed to Joseph.M.Truschelli@mass.gov and submitted by 5:00 p.m. on **April 10, 2020**.

Sincerely,

/s/ Joseph M. Truschelli

Joseph M. Truschelli
Acting Director, Consumer Division