

**Jacob Ve Vaughn**

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**From:** Eskamani, Anna <Anna.Eskamani@myfloridahouse.gov>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, July 29, 2020 12:58 AM  
**To:** Office of Commissioner Polmann; Office of Commissioner Graham; Office of Chairman Clark; Office of Commissioner Brown; Office of Commissioner Fay  
**Cc:** Records Clerk  
**Subject:** Comment On Pandemic Impact on Customers and Utilities Workshop  
**Attachments:** Rep. Eskamani Letter to PSC COVID19.pdf

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Completed

Dear Commissioners,

I hope this message finds you and your families well, and healthy.

Please find attached my comments for today's *Pandemic Impact on Customers and Utilities Workshop*. I hope you take my suggestions into consideration as we are working with tens of thousands of Floridians each day struggling to make ends meet, fearful of disconnections and late fees from their utility company.

With gratitude,

Rep. Eskamani

Representative Anna V. Eskamani  
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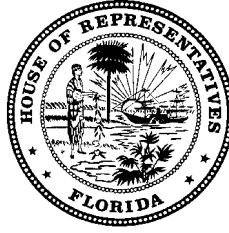


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# Florida House of Representatives

*Representative Anna V. Eskamani*

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July 29, 2020

**RE: COVID-19 Impact on Ratepayers and Recommendations to Improve Energy Security**

Dear Commissioners:

As you consider the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for both utilities and Florida ratepayers during your workshop scheduled for July 29th, I urge you to do all within your power to protect Floridians and prevent utility shut-offs across the state.

Through no fault of their own, Floridians, including my constituents, are suffering under the threat of both the COVID-19 pandemic and economic hardship. In addition to the pandemic, we have entered hurricane season which is expected to be more active than past years with NOAA predicting [13 to 19 named storms and 3 to 6 major hurricanes](#). Floridians face massive unemployment and a broken unemployment system, leading to months of delayed rent, mortgages, and utilities bills.

Electricity is unequivocally a public health matter. As we continue to self-quarantine due to the pandemic, utility customers must continue to rely on air conditioning in their homes to stay cool while [paying higher electric bills and facing financial hardship](#). With the threat of hurricane season and hot summer temperatures, I am concerned about the public health impacts of future shut offs. We must ensure all Floridians can safely stay at home.

At this critical moment, we ask the Commission to provide leadership and direction to electric utilities concerning their response to COVID-19 and hurricane season. This includes:

- **Formally suspend disconnections through the end of 2020** in order to allow our community to get back on its feet in these trying times. The impacts of this outbreak will be felt for months beyond the declared state of emergency and families may still be waiting for economic assistance during this time.

Creating a cushion and a grace period after the state of emergency ends will go a long way to supporting families struggling to get back on their feet.

- **Renegotiating or setting up reasonable payment plans for residents in need of assistance.** The onus should not be on vulnerable customers to set up payment plans. Utility companies should be instructed to reach out and work with their customers to create payment plans.
- **Forgive bills for more impacted and most vulnerable customers.** For residents struggling under the economic crisis, deferment is not relief. The application time required and inconsistency across geographies is burdensome to these residents who need aid to maintain or regain access to electricity. The limited availability of community agency funds means that many residents will never be able to access that form of relief. At this time, these two forms of relief are insufficient, and direct aid in the form of bill forgiveness is necessary to the survival of residents. Specifically, this includes residents experiencing unemployment as a result of COVID-19, Asset Limited Income Constrained but Employed (ALICE) residents, and energy burdened residents.
- **Do not back charge or apply late fees to customers who would have been disconnected** for accrued usage once the suspension period ends. Given the increase in financial burdens, struggling families should not be expected to pay late fees or higher bills once the state of emergency is lifted.
- **Facilitate conversation and center vulnerable ratepayers.** Rather than addressing uncollectible debt in a piecemeal fashion as individual utilities file petitions for relief, the Commission should open a docket that covers both utilities' and customers' financial challenges arising due to COVID-19. The Commission should also commit to hosting additional workshops centering the experiences and needs of vulnerable ratepayers and community stakeholders.
- **Provide greater transparency.** The Commission should require utilities to file comprehensive monthly data related to the COVID-19 crisis to inform the Commission's decision-making including the number and type of customers facing disconnection, the amount of balances owed, and socioeconomic and demographic data for residents facing disconnection.

On Thursday, July 23, 2020 the [Wisconsin Public Service Commission extended the statewide moratorium on utility disconnections until September 1, 2020](#). The [State of Virginia has taken similar action](#). I urge our Public Service Commission to show similar leadership.

Time is of the essence. I am deeply concerned about future utility disconnections beyond the declared state of emergency, the inability of families to pay for their electric bills in the coming months, and undue stress placed on those who are financially struggling to make ends meet during this outbreak. The Public Service Commission must act swiftly to avoid jeopardizing the lives and livelihoods of vulnerable Floridians during this crisis.

Sincerely,



**Representative Anna V. Eskamani**  
Florida House of Representatives, District 47