

Brian Schultz

From: Brian Schultz on behalf of Records Clerk
Sent: Friday, January 22, 2021 3:12 PM
To: 'ruhland@earthjustice.org'
Cc: Consumer Contact
Subject: FW: Request for a Covid-19 Workshop
Attachments: 2021 1 22 - CIC Request for Workshop.pdf

Good Afternoon,

We will be placing your comments in Dkt 20210000-OT and forwarding your comments to the Office of Consumer Assistance and Outreach.

Sincerely,

Brian Schultz

Commission Deputy Clerk II
Florida Public Service Commission
2540 Shumard Oak Boulevard
Tallahassee, Florida 32399
850.413.6770

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From: Rachael Uhland <ruhland@earthjustice.org>
Sent: Friday, January 22, 2021 12:45 PM
To: Office of Chairman Clark <Commissioner.Clark@psc.state.fl.us>; Records Clerk <CLERK@PSC.STATE.FL.US>
Subject: Request for a Covid-19 Workshop

Good afternoon:

Please find attached a request from the Connected in Crisis Coalition requesting a Covid-19 workshop to be held by the Public Service Commission.

Thank you.

Rachael Uhland
pronouns: she/her/hers
Research & Policy Analyst
111 South Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.,
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January 22, 2021

Submitted via email

Chairman Gary F. Clark
Florida Public Service Commission
2540 Shumard Oak Boulevard
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0850
Commissioner.Clark@psc.state.fl.us
clerk@psc.state.fl.us

RE: Request for COVID-19 Workshop for Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Dear Chairman Gary Clark:

The following letter is a request of many nonprofit organizations from across Florida for the Florida Public Service Commission (PSC) to hold a workshop on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

On July 29, 2020, the PSC held a workshop on the impacts the COVID-19 pandemic has had on Florida's utilities. In July, representatives from the State's largest regulated utilities informed regulators that hundreds of thousands of Florida residents are falling behind on their utility payments and may be subject to large overdue bills.

That is a now a reality and Florida's families are struggling. The days between December 1st through the 4th were listed as the deadliest days in American history. There are over 1,138,000 cases of COVID-19 in Florida and over 22,000 deaths. In the midst of this economic and public health calamity, Duke Energy Florida, Tampa Electric Company, and Florida Power & Light Co. have cut-off Floridians' electricity due to non-payment.

Given the extreme weather conditions we face in Florida, electricity is a necessity, not a luxury. This is a crisis in public health and power is necessary for the safety of all Floridians. During the month of November, over 103,000 Florida families have had their utility service disconnected. Equally alarming, over 700,000 families have received a notice of discontinuance of service. In addition to facing a global pandemic, these families are having to deal with the arduous consequences of losing their utility services during a time where it is crucial that people shelter at home to keep themselves and others safe.

The duty of utilities should be to the residents of Florida, not their shareholders or their bottom-line. Outreach or payment plans on behalf of the utilities are not enough. These are times when people are deciding between food on the table or power. Forcing people to choose to pay one bill over another is not acceptable.

No one should deal with loss of utility services due to inability to pay during the COVID-19 pandemic. No one should deal with loss of power during the holidays and a global pandemic. People are concerned with financial hardship and loss; they need an intervention that protects their welfare. For these reasons, we respectfully request that the Florida Public Service Commission hold a workshop to address the impact of COVID-19 on utility service for Floridians. Now is the time for action.

In previous letters, we have outlined recommendations that the Florida PSC can adopt and are listed below:

- 1. The PSC should require Florida utilities to extend stays on disconnections through June 1, 2021 at the earliest.**

The majority of U.S. States passed statewide moratoria on utility disconnections in response to the outbreak and spread of COVID-19. We commend Florida's utilities for their voluntary suspensions of disconnection

for late payment in the early stages of the outbreak, which proved critical to ensuring the energy security of thousands of Floridians. However, the investor-owned utilities have already terminated these protections. Prematurely dispensing these protections undermines the health and safety of Florida residents.

2. The Governor or the PSC should mandate utilities to reconnect customers disconnected from power from March 9, 2020 through the present, especially residential households.

While we call for forward-looking protections, we cannot ignore that the gears of disconnections have already begun. To ensure that protective measures do not leave any customers behind, we call on the PSC to order that utilities reconnect any previously disconnected customers, especially residential households, dating back to the beginning of the state of emergency. Some customers will have moved or left service territories, but utilities should at least send notice that reconnection without fee and enrollment in a balance management plan is available.

3. The PSC should mandate utilities to waive fees and fines for customers through June 1, 2021.

Punitive measures to ensure compliance are inappropriate during the present crisis. Utilities should suspend fines that they normally charge for late payment, return payment, credit or debit card payment, and service reconnection until the State has achieved a full recovery.

4. The Commission should open a docket that covers both utilities' and customers' financial challenges arising due to COVID-19, and in particular, should hold additional workshops centered on the experiences and needs of vulnerable ratepayers, community stakeholders, and utility customers impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The July 29, 2020 workshop on COVID-19 impacts to utilities did not allow for public comment. As a result, crucial voices have been left out of the conversation. The PSC has not consulted with anyone who can credibly speak specifically on behalf of the low income, Black, Latino, and Indigenous communities that have been most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. These communities face burdens and barriers to participation in programs that PSC members and staff must take into consideration. The customers themselves are the ones best suited to determine whether utility programs are sufficient to meet their needs.

5. The PSC should urge utilities to extend debt forgiveness to households facing unemployment, ALICE constrained households, and energy-debt burdened households.

Residents seeking assistance with their bills have found that available support falls into two general categories: deferment through repayment plans and third-party agency bill assistance. For residents struggling under the current economic crisis, deferment is not relief, and the limited availability of funds means that many residents will never see relief from third-party bill assistance. Direct bill forgiveness is necessary to the survival of households experiencing unemployment, ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained but Employed) households, and low-income energy burdened households (households that pay over 6% of their income on utilities). The PSC should do everything within its power to strongly urge and order the utilities to pass savings and profits on to residential customers in the form of debt forgiveness. Such practices are a moral imperative at this time. The PSC should send a clear message that they will view such programs as strong evidence of prudent customer debt management practices.

6. The PSC should establish and strongly recommend guidelines for utility balance management programs (alternatively referred to as “arrears management programs”) that meet Floridians’ needs based on best practices established in other parts of the country.

Balance Management Programs should not impose up-front costs, should automatically enroll eligible customers, should allow for sufficient time-frames to ensure customers do not become energy-burdened, and should include a meaningful debt forgiveness element for participating customers (the debt forgiveness element offered by FPL is not sufficient).

We urge the Florida Public Service Commission to convene a workshop and consider these recommendations.

Signed:

Connected in Crisis Coalition

Brian Schultz

From: Hong Wang on behalf of Records Clerk
Sent: Friday, January 22, 2021 3:02 PM
To: Jennifer Crawford
Cc: Brian Schultz
Subject: RE: Request for a Covid-19 Workshop

Ok, thanks!

Brian, would you please process this as a regular consumer correspondence.

Thanks!

From: Jennifer Crawford <jcrawfor@psc.state.fl.us>
Sent: Friday, January 22, 2021 2:49 PM
To: Records Clerk <CLERK@PSC.STATE.FL.US>; Shaw Stiller <SStiller@psc.state.fl.us>; Tripp Coston <TCoston@PSC.STATE.FL.US>
Cc: Brian Schultz <BSchultz@psc.state.fl.us>
Subject: RE: Request for a Covid-19 Workshop

Personally speaking, I think it should go in the 20210000-OT docket, with a forward to CAO.

From: Hong Wang **On Behalf Of** Records Clerk
Sent: Friday, January 22, 2021 2:43 PM
To: Jennifer Crawford; Shaw Stiller; Tripp Coston
Cc: Brian Schultz
Subject: FW: Request for a Covid-19 Workshop

Would you guys please take a look at this request for a Covid-19 workshop from the Connected in Crisis Coalition, and let us know whether we should treat it as consumer correspondence, place it in Docket 20210000 and forward it to CAO? If not, what should we do with it?

Thanks!

Hong

From: Rachael Uhland <ruhland@earthjustice.org>
Sent: Friday, January 22, 2021 12:45 PM
To: Office of Chairman Clark <Commissioner.Clark@psc.state.fl.us>; Records Clerk <CLERK@PSC.STATE.FL.US>
Subject: Request for a Covid-19 Workshop

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Rachael Uhland
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Research & Policy Analyst

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