

May 19, 2020

Chairman Charlotte Lane
Public Service Commission of West Virginia
201 Brooks Street
Charleston, WV 25301

Dear Chairman Lane,

I write regarding the recent order issued by the West Virginia Public Service Commission addressing COVID-19-related costs in determining rate recovery for utilities. I share your concern for West Virginian utility customers who have been impacted by the Coronavirus and the job losses that have come with it. I appreciate the early actions of the West Virginia Public Services Commission and the utilities that operate in the state to stop service disconnections when customers have not been able to pay their bills. In the middle of a pandemic is not the time to cut off essential services.

I also understand the economic impacts of the pandemic has created a cash flow problem for our utilities, who are seeing rising rates of non-payment while incurring new costs associated with keeping their essential workforce safe. This unsustainable situation can't last forever – it's bad for utilities and bad for customers in the long run.

While I'm encouraged to see some gradual reopening of the economy, we are not yet out of the woods and it will take some time for the economy to resemble anything close to normal. That's why I urge the Commission to keep working with West Virginia utilities to continue to suspend service disconnections and expand payment options.

At the federal level, I supported an additional \$900 million assistance to customers in the CARES Act through the federally-funded Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), which is administered by states. For qualifying individuals, LIHEAP funds are used to pay utility bills, relieving customers of unpaid debt and keeping utilities whole. I am also working with my colleagues in Congress on ways to provide financial assistance to some utilities in the next relief package, recognizing the different utility business models and the different needs across the country. I urge the Commission to work with Congress on appropriate and targeted relief for both customers and utilities.

I urge the Commission not to approve any rate hikes while we are still very much in the middle of battling the Coronavirus and have not yet begun our economic recovery. It is not the time to raise costs on customers already struggling to pay their bills. I look forward to working with you on this issue to protect West Virginians.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joe Manchin III". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

U.S. Senator Joe Manchin III