



California Public Utilities Commission  
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**PRESS RELEASE**

Docket #: Res. M-4849

## **CPUC EXTENDS EMERGENCY UTILITY CUSTOMER PROTECTIONS AND TAKES FURTHER ACTION TO ADDRESS ENERGY ARREARAGES DURING COVID-19**

**UPDATED: February 18, 2021:** The text below has been corrected as follows: Data presented at a CPUC [COVID Impacts on Energy Customers Workshop](#) in November 2020 showed a dramatic increase in unpaid residential bills. Updated data presented at the Commission meeting yesterday showed more than \$1 billion in past due residential energy bills.

SAN FRANCISCO, February 11, 2021 - The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), in its ongoing efforts to ensure continued access to essential utility services during the COVID-19 pandemic, today extended customer protections for residential and small business customers and took action to address energy utility customer bill debt.

The CPUC's Commissioners voted unanimously to extend utility customer protection measures that had been previously adopted, and directed energy, water, and communications companies under CPUC jurisdiction to suspend customer disconnections for non-payments from April 16, 2021 to June 30, 2021. These Emergency Customer Protections were originally adopted in [Resolution M-4842](#) on March 2020, following the March 4, 2020 State of Emergency declaration by Governor Gavin Newsom. Most notably, the utilities must continue to:

- Retroactively apply the customer protection measures from March 4, 2020 onward;
- Suspend disconnections of customers who have not paid bills; and,
- Create additional bill payment plan options for customers and proactively communicate with customers to enroll or sustain their enrollment in programs to manage their utility bills.



The CPUC’s Commissioners also voted unanimously today to address through a new proceeding (called a Rulemaking) the growing energy arrearages related to the COVID-19 period. Despite efforts by the CPUC and the utilities to help lower energy bills during the pandemic, many have still struggled to pay their bills. Data presented at a CPUC [COVID Impacts on Energy Customers Workshop](#) in November 2020 showed a dramatic increase of customers with unpaid bills totaling more than \$500 and an increase of enrollments in California Alternate Rates for Energy (CARE), a bill discount program for low-income customers. Updated data presented at the Commission meeting today showed almost nine million customers have not been able to pay their electric or gas bills in full. Through this new proceeding, the CPUC will consider ways to provide customers who have struggled to pay their energy bills during this unprecedented time, an opportunity to become current on their energy utility bills. The CPUC will examine the need for relief tied to the COVID-19 pandemic, with consideration of appropriate parameters, cost estimates, and potential funding sources.

“It is critical we proactively address the large and growing energy bill arrearages that have accrued during the pandemic,” said CPUC President Marybel Batjer. “The new arrearages Rulemaking provides us with a venue to be creative in developing and implementing measures that will help ensure relief to customers once the moratorium on customer disconnections for non-payment ends.”

“As we embark into 2021, the CPUC continues to take steps to support customers of regulated energy, water, and communications companies. We have directed utilities to extend emergency customer protections created following the COVID-19 pandemic, and we will take action through a new proceeding to address energy utility customer debt accumulated through the pandemic,” said Commissioner Martha Guzman Aceves. “We have also established an Arrearage Management Plan to assist low-income customers, which is available now to provide Californians with yet another tool to get out from under utility debt caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.”

“Our Decision today ensures that utilities will continue to provide the customer protections we previously ordered while the economic impacts of the pandemic linger,” said Commissioner Clifford Rechtschaffen. “In addition, our new proceeding will put in place debt management programs tailored to these extremely challenging times, with special consideration for the most vulnerable in our communities who may be having trouble paying their energy bill.”



“The pandemic and its economic impacts are ongoing, and I see our Rulemaking as an important part of the CPUC’s effort to support vulnerable customers when the disconnections moratorium expires,” said Commissioner Genevieve Shiroma. “I’m looking forward to leveraging the Low Income Oversight Board’s considerable expertise to make sure utility communications to customers during the transition are effective and reach the most vulnerable customers.”

The proposal voted on (Res. M-4849) to extend consumer protections is available at <https://docs.cpuc.ca.gov/PublishedDocs/Published/G000/M364/K581/364581188.PDF>.

Read more about these actions and other steps the CPUC is taking to ensure utilities under its jurisdiction are supporting communities during these challenging times by visiting [www.cpuc.ca.gov/covid](http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/covid).

For a list of consumer protection provisions utilities are enacting in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, please visit [www.cpuc.ca.gov/covid19protections](http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/covid19protections).

The CPUC regulates services and utilities, safeguards the environment, and assures Californians’ access to safe and reliable utility infrastructure and services. For more information on the CPUC, please visit [www.cpuc.ca.gov](http://www.cpuc.ca.gov).

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