



**California Public Utilities Commission**  
**505 Van Ness Ave., San Francisco**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**PRESS RELEASE**

Docket #: R.21-02-014

## **CPUC PROVIDES RELIEF FOR CUSTOMERS WHO HAVE ENERGY BILL DEBT**

SAN FRANCISCO, June 24, 2021 - The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), in ongoing efforts to ensure continued access to essential utility services during the COVID-19 pandemic, today suspended disconnections of residential and small business customers for an additional three months, through September 30, 2021. This provides time for energy utilities to notify customers of a new CPUC solution to resolving COVID-19 era utility bill debt, which provides residential customers two years over which to pay off deferred energy bills, with help anticipated to become available in the California state budget. Similar relief was ordered for small businesses.

Retaining access to electricity and natural gas service remains critical to public health. Without the CPUC's intervention, residential utility customers with energy utility bill arrearages would face balloon payments and risk losing their utility service if they fail to negotiate with their utility when the disconnection moratorium ends on June 30, 2021.

Under today's Decision, customers of the large investor-owned utilities with arrearages over 60 days old will automatically be enrolled in 24-month payment plans. There is an opt-out provision for customers who do not want to be enrolled in the payment plans. Nothing prevents customers enrolled in payment plans from applying funding from relief programs, accelerating payments or paying off entirely their utility arrearage to better fit their own circumstances.

Residential customers of small electric utilities Bear Valley, CalPeco Electric, and PacifiCorp with arrears over 60 days will automatically be enrolled in 12 or 24-month payment plans, with the same opt-out and early payment provisions. For Southwest Gas residential customers, the utility's existing



protections will prevail. Southwest Gas residential customers have already been automatically enrolled in 8-month payment plans, and Southwest Gas permits low-income customers impacted by COVID-19 to, upon request, halt disconnections through the end of 2021.

All energy utilities, large or small, must automatically enroll their small business customers in plans with payoff terms long enough so that the debt payments are no more than 10 percent over their average bill, or for small business customers located in disadvantaged communities, no more than 5 percent over their average bill.

Together with significant state and federally funded arrearage relief programs that are beginning to be implemented, these mandatory, automatic amortizations of debt allow time for customers to gradually address the debt and puts them on a path toward solvency.

To address the mixed record of payment plan success, today's decision pairs payment plans with intensive follow-up efforts by community based organizations (CBOs). As a first step toward this enhancement, the CPUC ordered energy utilities to begin documenting their partnerships with CBOs as a means of helping the hardest-to-reach customers navigate these important relief programs.

“This Decision will extend the CPUC’s disconnection moratorium for our large and small electric/natural gas utilities until September 30, 2021 in order to allow for potential arrearage forgiveness of \$1 billion by our state for the most vulnerable Californians. In addition, the CPUC is directing automatic enrollment in payment plans for residential and small business customers, including enhanced coordination provisions between community-based organizations and regulated utilities,” said Commissioner Martha Guzman Aceves, the Commissioner assigned to the proceeding.

“The CPUC continues to support customers in addressing the consequences of the pandemic by offering these additional payment plans and greater latitude to avoid disconnections,” said Commissioner Genevieve Shiroma.

The CPUC has taken a number of actions to help consumers maintain utility service during the COVID-19 pandemic, including:



- [Extended](#) customer protections for residential and small business customers and took action to address energy utility customer bill debt.
- [Determined](#) that energy, water, sewer, and communications companies under CPUC jurisdiction should halt customer disconnections for non-payment as a result of the State of Emergency called by Gov. Gavin Newsom due to COVID-19.
- Temporarily [suspended](#) renewal requirements for the California Universal Telephone Service Program (California LifeLine), California Alternate Rates for Energy (CARE), and Family Electric Rate Assistance (FERA) programs to ensure continued affordable access to communications and energy services during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Held a public [workshop](#) to assess the continued impacts of COVID-19 on customers in the energy sector and explore innovation solutions to address the most pressing customer needs.
- [Increased](#) access to no-cost and low-cost mobile broadband plans to meet Californians' needs during the pandemic and beyond.
- Limited the number of residential disconnections in 2021 to no more than 4 percent (Pacific Gas and Electric Company) 3 percent (San Diego Gas & Electric) 7 percent (Southern California Edison) and 2 percent (Southern California Gas Company) of customers regardless of the number of customers with unpaid bills.

The proposal voted on is available at:

<https://docs.cpuc.ca.gov/PublishedDocs/Published/G000/M389/K180/389180220.PDF>.

Documents related to the proceeding are available at:

[https://apps.cpuc.ca.gov/apex/f?p=401:56:0::NO:RP,57,RIR:P5\\_PROCEEDING\\_SELECT:R2102014](https://apps.cpuc.ca.gov/apex/f?p=401:56:0::NO:RP,57,RIR:P5_PROCEEDING_SELECT:R2102014).

The CPUC regulates services and utilities, protects consumers, 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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