



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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact: Terrie Prosper, 415.703.1366, news@cpuc.ca.gov

PRESS RELEASE

Docket #: R.21-02-014

CPUC MOBILIZES COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATIONS FOR PILOT PROGRAM TO HELP CONSUMERS WITH UTILITY DEBT

SAN FRANCISCO, April 7, 2022 - The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), in continuing actions to help consumers resolve their energy utility debt, today ordered utilities to develop a pilot program to mobilize community-based organizations (CBOs) to assist consumers with their utility bills.

Under today's Decision, utilities will develop a CBO Case Management Pilot Program proposal to serve California communities where, during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, electric bills were highest relative to the available resources of the community. The anticipated pilot will serve approximately 12,000 customers who would otherwise continue to face difficulty in resolving their utility bill debt once the statewide relief distributed to utilities is applied to customer accounts. The statewide relief program requires energy utilities to apply relief funds to customer accounts by the end of March 2022. Energy utilities are prohibited from disconnecting customers in receipt of relief for 90 days after the funds are applied.

Through today's Decision, the CPUC established a CBO Pilot Working Group to guide and oversee the development of the pilot proposal, including selection of the CBOs in the targeted communities. Pacific Gas and Electric Company will convene the CBO Pilot Working Group and require representatives from a variety of advocacy groups, oversight boards, and CBOs to participate in the CBO Pilot Working Group. The CBO Pilot Working Group will consider and propose a budget, payment structure, and evaluation method for the CBO Pilot.

"We know that case management by trusted CBO partners helps customers with high amounts of arrearages, or otherwise at risk of disconnection, keep their lights and other essential utilities powered," said Commissioner Darcie L. Houck, the Commissioner assigned to the proceeding. "The COVID-19

pandemic has changed all of our lives. Two years later, as we start to emerge from the pandemic, we know that long-term efforts will be necessary for recovery. Today's Decision emphasizes the importance of stakeholder coordination and input for the creation of a successful proposal of the CBO pilot, and we will continue to work through these issues in the disconnections proceeding."

Added Commissioner Genevieve Shiroma, "Community-based organizations are trusted organizations and well-positioned to help customers overcome barriers to managing their utility energy bills, and the CPUC should capitalize on that."

In summer 2021, the CPUC ordered energy utilities to automatically allow customers two years over which to pay off outstanding utility bill debt through payment plans. Subsequently the California Arrearage Payment Program (CAPP) distributed to the energy utilities enough funding to reduce each residential customer's debt (the same debt wrapped up in payment plans) by more than half. At the same time in [D.21-06-036](#), the CPUC acknowledged the extra time afforded by payment plans may not be sufficient for certain customers to resolve their utility bill debt. To enhance the likelihood of success in eliminating utility bill debt, the CPUC paired payment plans with intensive follow-up efforts by CBOs. Examination of the existing CBO networks revealed the current services provided by CBOs do not include case management, a necessary service to help customers navigate the variety of assistance and relief options developed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Today's Decision addresses this issue by targeting and prioritizing a limited number of communities and customers for CBO assistance for purposes of the initial CBO pilot proposal. The two targets for CBO case management are: 1) communities where electricity is most unaffordable in California; and 2) customers at highest risk of disconnection, in accordance with investor-owned utility disconnection policies and practices.

The CPUC is addressing energy rates in a number of ways, including rate assistance programs, pilot programs to improve the affordability of utility services for Californians, and exploring strategies to mitigate future energy rate increases in an ongoing utility [affordability](#) proceeding.

The proposal voted on is available at

<https://docs.cpuc.ca.gov/PublishedDocs/Published/G000/M465/K943/465943143.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.

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.

###