

September 16, 2020
Testimony prepared for House Energy & Technology

Good morning,

My name is Carol Flint, I serve as the Director for Consumer Affairs and Public Information at the Department of Public Service.

It's been my pleasure to work closely with Deputy Commissioner Allen to help develop the Vermont COVID-19 Arrearage Assistance Program. The program is meant to help Vermonters, including businesses, that are potentially at risk of having their utility service disconnected and who suffered economic hardship due to income loss because of COVID-19. Per H.966, assistance is limited to utility service regulated by the Vermont Public Utility Commission and for which utility services the PUC prohibited disconnection through its moratorium. These utility services include electricity, natural gas, landline telephone, and private water companies.

The program was developed in close cooperation with the Agency of Digital Services to ensure an easily accessed online application. ADS provided us with access to the MTX software team, who also developed online applications for Agriculture and ACCD.

We, with ADS and MTX, were able to quickly spin up an online application using the Salesforce software by August 15 that was made available to the public on August 18. The application is available from the Department of Public Service [home page](#).

The Department contracted with the Vermont Community Action Agencies to assist Vermonters who have limited or no access to the Internet with the online application. The CAAs have also been distributing information about the program.

Utilities were provided with simple messaging about the program to include as bill inserts or on-bill messaging. Messaging was also provided for utilities to promote the program via social media such as Facebook, Front Porch Forum or Twitter.

A report from 9/16/2020 at 9:30 a.m. shows that 1,937 Vermonters have applied for assistance. Applications break out as 1,839 residential application and 98 nonresidential applications.

Applicants may apply for assistance for any of the four utility types in a single application. (Electrics – 17, landline providers – 28, private regulated water companies – 15 and one natural gas provider)

Many of the landline providers listed on the application may only provide service to a limited number of business customers. Customers that receive landline service via voice of Internet protocol may also apply for assistance.

Applications are currently under review by utilities. This is a critical function necessary to verify and qualify eligible arrearages. The Department has contracted with a third-party administrator, Solix, to assist with review of applications if or when a utility, particularly landline providers are

unable to review applications. Utilities began reviewing applications last week and 521 applications have now been reviewed. About 300 of those applications were reviewed in just the last 24 hours.

Currently, the project team is laser focused on getting the remaining pieces in place to begin approving grants for payment that have been reviewed and verified by utilities. These processes are planned to be available for user access testing tomorrow. Payments will be made as soon as the business processes for payment are in place to ensure that the State's payment systems can process these payments. Additionally, systems are still in development to ensure that payments are not duplicated.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide an update about the Arrearage Assistance Program.

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