

March 19, 2021

Dear Sen. Kitchel,

Thank you for your continued support for Vermonters who are facing economic pressures brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

We recognize a lot remains in flux around the various streams of federal dollars, and while some has been earmarked for housing supports that will include assistance for customers based on income qualification and other restrictions, we remain very concerned about the rest of our customers, and that there will not be general assistance for all utility customers affected by the pandemic, regardless of income.

To continue to help all customers, and based on the recent filings by utilities in March at the Public Utility Commission regarding continued growing customer debt, we respectfully request an additional \$15 million be appropriated to the Vermont COVID-19 Arrearage Assistance Program and made available specifically for customers not otherwise eligible for available utility relief. We know this program works for both residential and commercial customers and directly provides needed assistance through this difficult time. The original \$8 million initially appropriated to the program was completely subscribed in the fall, yet, accounts receivable continue to grow statewide as customers continue to suffer the economic fall out of the pandemic.

This support is truly needed to help customers now. In early 2020, arrearages across utilities were \$3.9 million. By the end of 2020, that had ballooned to \$16.1 million – and that number has risen further up over \$18 million today. It continues to grow. Again, all of this is with the money previously allocated and used to help customers through VCAAP last fall.

The impacts of the pandemic cut across all sectors, incomes, circumstances, and health conditions. The impact of carrying large overdue utility bills weighs heavily on families and business owners. Setting up Vermonters for success will be critical to our full and total recovery from the COVID pandemic, and that can be achieved through the allocation of funds to help them. Ensuring overdue utility bills don't equate to rate pressure down the road for other customers is part of that recovery.

GMP and all utilities will continue to work compassionately with all our customers. We do know directly from customers how much appreciated the initial VCAAP funding was, and how more is needed to emerge from the pandemic stronger.

I'm happy to answer any questions you have and provide further information. We know there are a lot of moving parts and pending guidance on the federal American Recovery Plan Act dollars, but believe this is an area that needs attention. Thank you for your time and support!

Sincerely, Robert

* * * Utility Assistance * * *

Sec. X. DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SERVICE; UTILITY RATEPAYER
ARREARAGES

* * *

The sum of \$15,000,000 is appropriated to the Department of Public Service for the purpose of simultaneously minimizing financial hardship caused by the COVID-19 public health emergency and also mitigating utility rate increases ultimately share by all ratepayers. As used in this section, a “utility” means a utility affected by the Public Utility Commission’s moratorium on utility disconnections. Funds shall be disbursed on a rolling basis to utility customers not otherwise eligible for utility assistance through the American Recovery Act or the CARES 2 Federal Stimulus Act. The Commissioner may contract with an independent third party to assist with program administration, with cost of administering the program utilized from the funding. Customer information submitted pursuant to this program shall be exempt from disclosure under the Vermont Public Records Act; such data may only be disclosed on an anonymized and aggregated basis.

Robert Dostis
VP Government Affairs
802-279-1351
dostis@greenmountainpower.com