

January 21, 2021

Chair Bray and Members of Senate Natural Resources and Energy

Chair Briglin and Members of House Natural Resources and Technology

Chair Hooper and Members of House Appropriations

Chair Kitchel and Members of Senate Appropriations

Chair Cummings and Members of Senate Finance

Chair Sirotkin and Members of Senate Economic Development, Housing & General Affairs

Chair Marcotte and Members of House Commerce and Economic Development

We, the undersigned Vermont energy utility representatives, are writing to seek help for our customers, as many are experiencing continued financial stresses and impacts due to the COVID crisis. We thank you for all your efforts to protect vulnerable Vermonters during this pandemic, including passing direct utility bill relief funding last year. Thanks to your work, more than ten thousand Vermont households and businesses have received help.

Even with that assistance, the financial fall out for customers and members continues to grow. Right now, over 40,000 Vermonters are more than 60 days behind on their utility bills and falling further behind every day. Households are facing hard decisions and businesses are struggling to stay viable. Many are facing financial hardships for the first time due to the pandemic. We have all worked with our members and customers through this pandemic and we are requesting continued assistance on their behalf.

Although there is currently a moratorium on involuntary utility disconnections in place, this is a temporary stop gap. Arrearages continue to grow, and action is needed to help customers from falling further behind on their bills. Vermont utilities are offering customers compassion, flexibility, and long-term payment arrangements, but many people will continue to find themselves in difficult financial circumstances. Going forward people will need more support and financial assistance to get caught up with their household expenses, including their electric and gas bills.

While the Vermont COVID-19 Arrearage Assistance Program (VCAAP) was essential in helping many customers through a total of \$8 million in funding, more is needed to help Vermonters. Right now, there is a more than \$15 million arrearage problem that is growing every day.

Here is some of what we know about the current extent of the problem customers are facing:

- Vermont Electric Cooperative
Over 60-day arrearages are 2 ½ times higher than one year ago.
Over 60-day arrearages at the end of 2020 were \$257,403 (1,184 members).
- Burlington Electric Department
Over 60-day arrearages are 3 ¼ times higher than one year ago.
Over 60-day arrearages at the end of 2020 were \$749,000 (4,007 rate-payers).

- Green Mountain Power
Over 60-day arrearages are over 4 times higher than one year ago.
Over 60-day arrearages at the end of 2020 were \$14 million (27,000 customers).
- Vermont Public Power Supply Authority
Over 60-day arrearages are 60% higher than one year ago.
Over 60-day arrearages at the end of 2020 were \$434,994 (1,387 rate-payers).
- Washington Electric Cooperative
Over 60-day arrearages are 5 times higher than one year ago.
Over 60-day arrearages at the end of 2020 were \$ 227,450 (894 members).
- Vermont Gas Systems
Over 60-day arrearages are 55% higher than one year ago.
Over 60-day arrearages at the end of 2020 were \$836,000 (5,757 rate-payers).

While the distribution of vaccinations creates a light at the end of the tunnel and hope for a return to normal, significant uncertainty and financial concern for customers remain. We urge the Vermont legislature to appropriate funds to meet this immediate need so that Vermont citizens and businesses will emerge stronger from this crisis. We stand ready to work with you to help our customers and members. Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

Andrea Cohen, Vermont Electric Cooperative



Melissa Bailey, Vermont Public Power Supply Authority



Patty Richards, Washington Electric Cooperative



Robert Dostis, Green Mountain Power



Darren Springer, Burlington Electric Department



Michael Lazorchak, Stowe Electric Department



Neale Lunderville, Vermont Gas Systems



cc: Speaker of the House Jill Krowinski
Senate Pro Tempore Becca Balint