

July 9, 2020

*****CONSUMER ALERT*****

ATTORNEY GENERAL RAOUL ISSUES GUIDANCE ON CONSUMER OPTIONS NOW THAT THE UTILITY SHUT-OFF MORATORIUM HAS ENDED

Chicago — Attorney General Kwame Raoul today highlighted free resources available to educate Illinois residents about their repayment options now that the state has moved into Phase 4 of the Governor's Restore Illinois plan. Utility consumers now have approximately 30 days to set up extended repayment plans to maintain their utility service and avoid disconnection for past due balances.

Attorney General Raoul is urging Illinois residents to visit the Attorney General's website to access information about their repayment options. The Attorney General's office has provided resources that outline the options for [large utility customers](#) and guidance for [small utility customers](#), and people should know that different requirements may apply depending on the customer's utility provider. While utilities cannot disconnect service or impose late payment fees until at least after July 26, Raoul is cautioning that disconnections could start as early as July 26, and some residents may have already begun to receive notices.

"The days and weeks ahead are traditionally some of the hottest annually in Illinois, and this year they coincide with the end of the moratorium that prevented utilities from disconnecting customers or imposing late fees during the pandemic," Raoul said. "Being disconnected from your utility service now could have fatal consequences. I am urging people – particularly seniors and vulnerable residents – to take advantage of the resources my office is providing free of charge to learn about your repayment options and possible financial assistance if you think you could be disconnected."

Consumers with past-due balances may receive a disconnection notice during the 30-day grace period that began when the moratorium ended on June 26, but utilities must offer repayment plans to help customers avoid disconnection. Consumers will be given 18 to 24 months to repay any accrued balances, and they may be eligible for financial assistance. Individuals experiencing financial hardship should call their utility in order to access expanded consumer accommodations.

On March 18, the Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) issued an emergency order mandating all public utilities to suspend service disconnections until at least May 1, or until the state of emergency connected to the COVID-19 pandemic was lifted. The order also dictated that utilities must suspend late fees, and adopt flexible credit and collections practices. The order applied to all Illinois electric, gas, water, and sewage public utilities services. In anticipation of the moratorium ending, Raoul's office, along with consumer groups and the ICC entered into an agreement with the major utility companies to enact important consumer protections once the moratorium has lifted.

As part of the agreement, utility companies will continue to offer more flexible credit and collection procedures for consumers for six months following the end of the moratorium. If consumers have stopped paying their bills during the moratorium, they may expect to receive notices from utility companies explaining past due balances and repayment options. Upon receiving a disconnection notice or a past due notice, consumers can enroll in a deferred payment arrangement of up to 24 months to avoid disconnection. Reduced down payments on payment plans will be available, and no down payment will be required for LIHEAP (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program) customers and customers who demonstrate financial hardship. Deposits associated with late or non-payment, arrearages, or credit-related issues will be waived for six months for consumers experiencing financial hardship. Additionally, expanded bill payment assistance will be available for low-income customers.

Utility companies are reporting disconnect, credit, and collections data now and over the next several months. Reporting will be broken down by ZIP code to allow the ICC to assess the impact a utility's disconnection and repayment practices may have on Illinois communities, including whether communities of color are disproportionately affected.

Attorney General Raoul encourages Illinois residents to [visit his website](#) for more information about the consumer protections in place, particularly if they are facing disconnection. Residents who have questions about the new protections can contact his office at 1-800-386-5438 (Chicago), 1-800-243-0618 (Springfield), 1-800-243-0607 (Carbondale), or by [filing an online complaint](#).