A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

To urge and request the Public Service Commission to prohibit energy and water companies from disconnecting services for a period of three months.

WHEREAS, a novel coronavirus named "coronavirus disease 2019", commonly referred to as COVID-19, was first detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province China, in December of 2019; and

WHEREAS, the coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are common in people and many different animal species; and

WHEREAS, COVID-19 is a respiratory illness that has a broad range of symptoms from mild, flu-like symptoms to severe breathing difficulties that result in death; and

WHEREAS, the first confirmed instance of person-to-person spread of the virus in the United States was recorded on January 30, 2020; and

WHEREAS, on the same day the World Health Organization declared the outbreak "a public health emergency of international concern"; and

WHEREAS, the rapid spread of COVID-19 lead the World Health Organization to upgrade its declaration to a "global pandemic" on March 11, 2020; and

WHEREAS, the first presumptive positive case of COVID-19 in Louisiana occurred on March 9, 2020; and

WHEREAS, the Governor of Louisiana declared a statewide public health emergency on March 11, 2020, due to the risks related to public health associated with the COVID-19 Coronavirus; and
WHEREAS, presently there is no vaccine to protect against COVID-19, there is a high probability of widespread exposure, and the disease poses an imminent threat to Louisiana citizens; and

WHEREAS, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), "older adults and those with severe underlying chronic medical conditions such as heart disease, lung disease, or diabetes seem to be at a higher risk for developing more serious complications from the COVID-19 illness"; and

WHEREAS, the CDC recommends people wash their hands often with soap and water for at least twenty seconds, especially after they have been in a public place, or after blowing their nose, coughing, or sneezing and also recommends the use of detergent to keep items clean; and

WHEREAS, on March 13, 2020, President Donald J. Trump declared a national emergency over the COVID-19 Coronavirus outbreak; and

WHEREAS, as of March 16, 2020, Louisiana reports 114 COVID-19 cases and two deaths from the virus; and

WHEREAS, the Public Service Commission is charged with ensuring a regulatory balance that enables utilities to provide customers with safe, adequate, and reliable services, at rates that are just, reasonable, equitable, and economically efficient; and

WHEREAS, the Public Service Commission has jurisdiction over publicly owned utilities providing electric, water, waste water, natural gas, and telecommunications services; and

WHEREAS, in the interest of protecting public health, the Public Service Commission should temporarily suspend disconnection of electric or gas service to residential customers for nonpayment; and

WHEREAS, the impact of the coronavirus in the state could cause economic suffering for many, specifically those who become sick or are forced to miss work, which also may ultimately result in job loss; and

WHEREAS, utility companies in New York agreed to a no-disconnect policy at the request of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Department of Public Service; and
WHEREAS, major private water companies in New York also agreed to suspend shut-offs during the pandemic; and

WHEREAS, on March 13, 2020, the West Virginia Public Service Commission urged all public utility companies in the state to suspend service terminations effective immediately, with exceptions for safety and customer requests; and

WHEREAS, in the past, when Louisiana has experienced severe temperatures during both the winter summer months, electric and gas companies suspended service terminations for nonpayment in the interest of public safety and health; and

WHEREAS, similar actions were taken after Hurricane Katrina impacted Louisiana; and

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic has already created financial burdens for many residents of Louisiana and those burdens may continue increasing for the disadvantaged; and

WHEREAS, suspending utility disconnections and decreasing the financial impact that residents may face will alleviate much of the inevitable financial stress that will result from the COVID-19 Coronavirus; and

WHEREAS, in the interest of public safety and preventing the spread of COVID-19 and given the severity of the COVID-19 Coronavirus and the uncertainty surrounding the impact it may have on Louisiana residents, the Public Service Commission should prohibit the suspension of utility services to ensure that those enduring financial strain and those members of disadvantaged communities will not have concerns about keeping critical utility services connected.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby urge and request the Public Service Commission to prohibit energy and water companies from disconnecting utility services for a period of three months.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a copy of this Resolution be transmitted to the secretary of the Public Service Commission.
The digest printed below was prepared by House Legislative Services. It constitutes no part of the legislative instrument. The keyword, one-liner, abstract, and digest do not constitute part of the law or proof or indicia of legislative intent. [R.S. 1:13(B) and 24:177(E)]

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