

The Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia have joined Faith Leaders across the country to Support of a National Moratorium on Power, Water, and Broadband Shutoffs

Letter addressed to : Senate Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Chairman Barasso, and Ranking Member Carper, Chairwoman Murkowski, Ranking Member Manchin, Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Cantwell,

On behalf of our congregants, members and supporters nationwide, we, the undersigned faith leaders and organizations urge the Senate to take decisive, moral action and implement a nationwide moratorium on the shut-offs of electricity, water, broadband, and all other essential utility services for all households, places of worship, and other non-profit community centers as part of the next COVID-19 rescue package.

As faith leaders in the Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Baha'i, and other religious traditions, we call on you to come to the aid of struggling families and houses of worship across the country--and ensure that we all have access to water, power, and broadband during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Nearly 80% of the American population self identifies as being grounded in a faith ideology. No matter the religion or denomination, our faiths require us to treat others with care, respect, and dignity. To honor not just our lives, but the lives of others; and to not consider ourselves cared for until our entire community is cared for.

We have united to acknowledge that the COVID-19 emergency is resulting in an economic crisis for millions of families across our country that is unprecedented in modern history—and in particular, is disproportionately harming Black, Brown, Indigenous, and other communities of color, and low-wealth families which comprises 60-85% of America.

Residential homes, places of worship, and other non-profit centers are at the frontlines of community survival. Access to utility services is more crucial than ever. To stop and survive the virus we all need water to drink, wash our clothes, and wash our hands; we need power for our refrigerators, air conditioners, medical devices, and communications devices running; and we need broadband for updates, information, education, work, and work searches. These needs have doubled down in the onset of what is essentially the season of heat waves and natural disasters that have become stronger and more frequent. With cases once again on the rise, our communities need additional protections. The NEED for action is IMMEDIATE.

In the richest country in the world, the fact that families are being shut off from electricity,

water, and broadband is a moral failure and an embarrassment. It indicates a callous heart and a glaring mis-management of our abundant resources. Although hundreds of communities, and dozens of states pledged to stop utility shut-offs at the beginning of the health crisis, these moratoriums are patchwork, and many have started to expire. The ramifications of this mass debt will be rivaled only by the great depression. To prevent a catastrophe of multi-generational impact is not only a requirement of good governance, it's a moral imperative. We know that attempts for amelioration have been put in place, such as the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), but those also come back to Broadband access. Water, power, and broadband are essential components of life. America needs you to act in her best interests NOW.

We must have 1. a moratorium on water, power, and broadband shutoffs nationwide, 2. a reinstatement of disconnected services, 3. a defined extended grace period to pay off any debts, 4. a waiver of late-payment fees, 5. and a forgiveness of all bills for low-wealth households, houses of worship, and other non-profit community centers for the duration of the emergency. Additionally, Congress must address the systemic issues underlying utility shut-offs by investing significant stimulus funds into long-term solutions. This includes resilient distributed clean energy systems, strong water and broadband infrastructure, and halting predatory loan practices that penalize the poor. Americans need you to do this work in your highest conscience.