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**Georgia Organization Contact:** Liz Coyle, Georgia Watch, lcoyle@georgiawatch.org

## **COVID-19 Crisis: 60 Organizations Call on Georgia Governor to Take Immediate Action to Ensure Residents are Protected from Utility Shut Offs**

Atlanta – Today, 60 organizations across Georgia called on Governor Brian Kemp to take immediate action pursuant to his authority granted under the state’s emergency management act to ensure utility customers remain connected to essential electric, gas, water, sewer, and telecommunications networks, both during and after the coronavirus emergency. State executive action is needed for several reasons, outlined [in a letter from the organizations to Governor Kemp.](#)

According to the letter, while many of Georgia’s utilities have acted voluntarily to suspend shut offs, others have not. Also, voluntary commitments from utilities are unenforceable and subject to change. Essential electric, gas, water, sewer, phone and broadband internet services are needed to comply with directives to stay at home while sick, engage in frequent hand-washing, work from home, participate in online education, consult with health care providers remotely, monitor the condition of vulnerable family and friends, and follow other public health recommendations.

“Access to lighting, electrical appliances, telecommunications services, heat and cooling are critical at any time, but especially so during a pandemic when Georgia residents are required to shelter and learn at home,” the organizations wrote. “This action will undoubtedly save lives.”

The letter specifically asks for gubernatorial action to ensure that all unregulated municipal utilities, electric cooperatives and telecommunications providers, in addition to regulated utilities, refrain from disconnecting customers from essential electric, water and telecommunications services during this state of emergency, and to require utilities to reconnect customers who were previously disconnected due to inability to pay.

Further, the letter requests specific guidance on the many needed changes to utility credit and collections practices to protect utility customers whose incomes have been devastated by the economic shutdown, and who face an uncertain financial cliff when emergency orders are lifted. Consistent with nationwide [guidance](#) from the National Consumer Law Center, the organizations recommend the Governor take the following actions to ensure that consumers are protected from financial harm both during and after emergency orders are lifted:

- Elimination of any customer deposit requirements;
- Enactment of an “Affordable Deferred Payment Arrangement” (ADPA) policy that is designed to ensure the creation of flexible, reasonable ADPAs that are negotiated based on a particular customer’s ability to pay and income and expense circumstances, requiring no set maximum on length of DPAs and no minimum monthly payment amount;
- Elimination of any requirement that disconnected customers pay the full arrearage due before reconnection, thereby permitting reconnection upon issuance of an affordable ADPA;
- Elimination of reconnection fees;

- Elimination of minimum balance requirements for prepaid utility service customers;
- Elimination of credit reporting for existing customers and credit checks for new service applicants; and
- Utility write-off of debt for consumers who can self-certify that they are eligible for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) but unable to receive LIHEAP grants due to a shortage of LIHEAP funds or inaccessible LIHEAP services.

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Signatory organizations:

Access to Capital for Entrepreneurs (ACE)	Groundswell
Atlanta Bicycle Coalition	Grove Park Foundation
Atlanta Center for Self Sufficiency	Harambee House/Center for Environmental Justice
Ayika Solutions	Housing Justice League
Bobby Dodd Institute	Independent Restaurant Owners and Chefs of Savannah
Center for Civic Innovation	SisterCARE Alliance
Center for Community Progress	Southern Alliance for Clean Energy
Center for Sustainable Communities	Southern Environmental Law Center
Chatham County Housing Coalition	LISC Atlanta
Coastal Georgia Indicators Coalition	Mercy Care
Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta	Mercy Housing Southeast
Deep Center	National Housing Trust
Economic Empowerment Initiative, Inc.	Paradise CDC
Enterprise Community Partners	Paradise Missionary Baptist Church
Environmental Community Action Inc.	Partnership for Southern Equity
Environment Georgia	Project Community Connections, Inc.
Faith in Public Life	Quest Community Development
Focused Community Strategies	Russell Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship
Georgia Advancing Communities Together	Sandy Springs Together
Georgia Budget & Policy Institute	Southface
Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence	The Kenekt
Georgia Coalition for the Peoples Agenda	Transformation Alliance
GEEARS: Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students	The Village Market ATL
Georgia Equality	Urban League of Greater Atlanta
Georgians for a Healthy Future	Village Micro Fund
Georgia Interfaith Power and Light (GIPL)	West Atlanta Watershed Alliance
Georgia Interfaith Public Policy Center	The Young Entrepreneurs of Atlanta Foundation, Inc.
Georgia Micro Enterprise Network	9to5 Georgia
Georgia PIRG	
Georgia STAND-UP	
Georgia WAND Education Fund	
Georgia Watch	