

## **Crisis Requires Action: Moratorium on Shut Offs & Utility Restoration for ALL NOW!**

*We are thinking about our members and all communities across the state during the health crisis of COVID-19 (CORONAVIRUS). We know how every health issue is amplified by social and economic factors. We will continue to organize and fight injustices that undermine attempts to grapple with the impacts of this current crisis. This week's regularly scheduled Wednesday meeting at the George Wiley Center is suspended. Although we will continue to return phone calls and reply to emails sent to: [georgewileycenterri@gmail.com](mailto:georgewileycenterri@gmail.com) our office will be closed for the time being in the interest of public health.*

**Every crisis illuminates our core values.** We all need to make sure that we don't allow this crisis to add unfairly to low-income households' bills. Calling emergency declarations around COVID-19 isn't sufficient without stopping the situations that harm our health and well-being. Making declarations isn't enough without challenging the conditions that can make the virus more deadly.

The George Wiley Center supports **the expansion and extension of the moratorium on electric, gas, water and sewer shut offs.** The George Wiley Center has often advocated for the expansion of the winter moratorium until May 1<sup>st</sup>. The George Wiley Center is also proud to have fought years ago for the creation of the winter moratorium that protects certain categories from shut off but at this point it is important to expand the moratorium to all residential consumers permanently.

There will be an **Emergency Open Meeting today: Monday, March 16, 2020 at 2:00 pm at the Rhode Island Public Utilities Commission located at 89 Jefferson Blvd. in Warwick. Although normally we would encourage our members to attend such a meeting, in order to encourage social distancing, you should not attend this meeting. Representatives of the George Wiley Center will be there to make our demands known.** The PUC will consider an emergency order to halt collections activities (terminations, sending accounts to collections agencies, extending the shut-off date in termination notices to the end of the emergency period) for a stated temporary period of time. This would apply to protected and standard customers of all regulated electric, gas, water, and sewer utilities. Such an order would not prohibit the utilities from sending out bills or termination notices (with a date after the emergency) nor would it prohibit them from entering into payment plans.

Although we are glad that the RI PUC is holding this Emergency Open meeting the George Wiley Center is asking for these three demands to address both this current health crisis and the underlining unfair utility structures that add to the severity of harm:

- **Permanent Moratorium on all utility terminations (electric, gas, water & sewer)**
- **Emergency Implementation of Percentage Income Payment Plan**

## - **Immediate Restoration of Utility Services for All Rhode Islanders**

We can't say that we care about our communities, including our most vulnerable, and allow for shut offs on essential services like energy, heat, water and sewer. Therefore, the George Wiley Center advocates **a permanent moratorium.**

Now is the time to implement emergency actions that will protect people in Rhode Island from unfair bills that have for too long jeopardized the energy security of working class and low-income households. The George Wiley Center demands an **emergency implementation of Percentage Income Payment Plan (PIPP) as we have proposed the last two legislative sessions.** PIPP is needed in order to prevent increased energy burden and long-term energy insecurity for low-income households in Rhode Island. This recent crisis has only added to the urgency of needing to implement this sound policy. PIPP would prevent those who would use this moment to make money off the seniors on fixed incomes, the disabled and low-income families. By immediately putting PIPP in place we have an antidote against unfair energy bill structures that add up to utility shut offs and fuel insecurity across Rhode Island. Immediate action to implement a Percentage Income Payment Plan will make a difference not only in addressing the consequences of dealing with this current health crisis adequately but will also prevent future hardship of our members at the George Wiley Center and for working class and low-income families across the state.

During this pandemic, it is time to put our community's health needs over corporate greed! In addition to the **expansion and extension of the moratorium on utility terminations,** and the **implementation of PIPP,** the George Wiley Center also advocates for the **immediate emergency restoration of all residential utility consumers** who are living without utility services (electric, gas, water and sewer). When we consider who is at risk and in need of our concern we can not forget those who are currently living without utilities. We expect the immediate restoration of anyone who has had their utilities terminated over the last 2 years and are currently without utility services. Thank you for making a difference during this pivotal moment.