

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, MARCH 19, 2020

Contacts:

- Jean Su, Center for Biological Diversity, (415) 770-3187, jsu@biologicaldiversity.org
- Chandra Farley, Partnership for Southern Equity, (404) 538-6236, cfarley@psequity.org
- Tom Goldtooth, Indigenous Environmental Network, (218) 760-0442, ientomg@gmail.com
- Reverend Michael Malcom, Alabama Interfaith Power and Light and People's Justice Council, (678) 913-7477, michael.malcom@alipl.org

In Coronavirus Crisis, 575 Groups Urge Halt to Electricity, Water Shutoffs

Letter to Governors, Utility Regulators Also Calls for Distributed Clean Energy, Equitable Water Payment Systems

WASHINGTON— More than 575 utility justice, labor, faith, consumer and environmental groups urged state governors, mayors and utility regulators today to put a moratorium on electricity and water-utility shutoffs in response to the coronavirus crisis and resulting job losses.

Today's [letter](#) also called for deeper policy changes that deploy distributed solar and establish percentage-of-income water-payment systems to address the systemic issues leading to shutoffs.

The coronavirus crisis will likely cause [widespread job losses](#) across America, disproportionately hurting low-wealth households, communities of color, and American Indian and Alaska Native communities. These families face difficulties in affording basic utility services, and some have already been disconnected from water and electricity.

"It's unconscionable that utilities are cutting off the electricity and water of families who have lost their jobs to the coronavirus crisis," said Jean Su, director of the Center for Biological Diversity's energy justice program. "The pandemic is worsening the already dire effects of poverty, climate change and dependence on fossil-fueled utilities. Stopping shutoffs is crucial, but governors should also work to transition families to clean energy systems that aren't dependent on dirty corporate utility power that can be cut off in a crisis."

"The rising costs of electricity due to the stressors of our fossil fuel-based economy exerts a crippling financial burden for many, especially workers earning low wages and seniors living on fixed incomes," said Chandra Farley, just energy director at the Partnership for Southern Equity. "The resulting utility burdens on black, brown and indigenous communities and people of color are being amplified by this crisis, with no long-term economic relief strategy in place. We must remain steadfast in our push for

equity-centered, clean energy policies that significantly enhance household economic stability and improve our collective health and well-being.”

“The U.S. needs to live up to its trust and treaty responsibility to American Indian and Alaska Natives to ensure their members, many who live in rural areas, do not experience electricity shut-offs during these times of uncertainty,” said Tom BK Goldtooth, executive director of the Indigenous Environmental Network. “Many tribal residents are on fixed incomes and already experiencing the threat of the coronavirus coming to their homes, bringing all its implications effecting human health and compounded by weakened economies and high unemployment.”

“As minister in the United Church of Christ I am greatly influenced by New Testament theology,” said Reverend Michael Malcom, executive director of Alabama Interfaith Power and Light and the People’s Justice Council. “One theological principle of the New Testament informs us that we are living out our beliefs when we ensure that the widows and the orphans are cared for. It is with this authority that I say that it is immoral to leave the most vulnerable in society without electricity during these uncertain times. This is our opportunity to come together and care for our community.”

Fewer than half of all states and a handful of cities have imposed moratoria on shutoffs over various utilities. According to the Energy and Policy Institute and Food & Water Watch, some [electricity](#) and [water providers](#) have also voluntarily enacted moratoria on shutoffs, though the majority of the nation’s 3,300 power utilities have not, including energy giant Alabama Power.

Even if moratoria have been implemented, they vary significantly in impact. Many moratoria fail to waive late fees, are short in duration, do not apply to all customer classes, and have no promises to reconnect disconnected customers to these services.

In addition to the call for moratoria, the groups also urge state leaders to tackle the systematic issues driving common utility shutoffs. These include committing to policies that increase the deployment of distributed clean energy systems and that establish percentage-of-income payment plans for water and other utility services, which enhance long-term energy and climate resilience for all families.

Alabama Interfaith Power and Light is Alabama's moral voice for climate justice and energy efficiency.

<https://www.alabamaipl.org/>

The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 1.7 million members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.

www.biologicaldiversity.org

IEN is a national and international alliance of Indigenous peoples working for the rights of Indigenous Peoples and for environmental, climate, energy and economic justice; to protect the territorial integrity and sacredness of Mother Earth.

<https://www.ienearth.org/>

The Partnership for Southern Equity (PSE) is an Atlanta-based nonprofit that advances policies and institutional actions that promote racial equity and shared prosperity for all in the growth of metropolitan Atlanta and the American South through an ecosystem-based model for multi-demographic engagement.

www.psequity.org

The People's Justice Council engages and equips communities with tools and access to build power from the grassroots up to fight for justice at the policy level.

<https://www.thepeoplesjusticecouncil.org>