STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
UTILITIES COMMISSION
RALEIGH

DOCKET NO. M-100, SUB 158

BEFORE THE NORTH CAROLINA UTILITIES COMMISSION

In the Matter of		
Investigation of Necessary and Appropriate Responses to the Novel Coronavirus COVID-19	))))))	ORDER SUSPENDING UTILITY DISCONNECTIONS FOR NON-PAYMENT, ALLOWING RECONNECTION, AND WAIVING CERTAIN FEES

BY THE COMMISSION: On March 10, 2020, Governor Roy Cooper issued Executive Order No. 116 declaring a State of Emergency in North Carolina to coordinate response and protective actions to prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). In so doing, the Governor ordered state agencies to cooperate in the implementation of the provisions of the executive order.

On March 14, 2020, Governor Cooper, finding that further action was necessary to protect the health and safety of the residents of North Carolina, slow the spread of the COVID-19 outbreak, reduce the number of people infected, and avoid strain on our health care system, issued Executive Order No. 117 prohibiting mass gatherings of more than 100 persons to limit the spread of COVID-19.

On March 16, 2020, the Commission acted in response to the declared State of Emergency and consistent with the Governor's executive orders to assist in preventing the spread of coronavirus by suspending all hearings scheduled to be held prior to April 13, 2020.

On March 17, 2020, Governor Cooper further issued Executive Order No. 118 closing restaurants and bars for dine-in service. In addition, that executive order recognizes and provides relief for the numerous workers in North Carolina who may have lost wages in restaurants and meeting places due to mass gathering restrictions.

Most of the major electric, natural gas, and water and wastewater utilities regulated by the Commission — including Duke Energy Carolinas, LLC; Duke Energy Progress, LLC; Virginia Electric and Power Company, Inc., d/b/a Dominion Energy North Carolina; Piedmont Natural Gas Company, Inc.; Public Service Company of North Carolina, Inc.; Aqua NC, Inc; and Carolina Water Service, Inc. of North Carolina — have notified the Commission that they are suspending disconnection of utility services for non-payment in recognition of the above restrictions and to avoid creating additional hardships for their customers.

The Commission commends these utilities and shares their concerns regarding the potentially devastating health and financial impacts on their customers' lives, such that immediate action is required. In addition to social distancing and other steps that may be taken to avoid exposure to the virus, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends frequent hand washing to reduce the risk of infection and prevent the spread of the disease — such recommended hygiene requires continued customer access during this time of heightened health concern to water, electricity, and natural gas at customer residences for both customer safety and the protection of the public.

Therefore, until the end of the State of Emergency or until further orders of the Commission, pursuant to N.C. Gen. Stat. § 62-32 and the Commission's general supervisory powers over the rates charged and service rendered by public utilities in this state, the Commission finds good cause in light of the nature of the current emergency to order that all jurisdictional electric, natural gas, and water and wastewater public utilities, including resellers, shall immediately cease customer disconnections due to non-payment of utility bills, except where necessary as a matter of safety or where requested by the customer, and waive the application of late fees incurred during the State of Emergency. The Commission further suspends, pending further orders, any and all regulations and provisions of individual utility tariffs on file that prevent or condition re-connection of disconnected customers. If, due to the current State of Emergency, a public utility finds it necessary to further deviate from its approved tariffs or Commission regulations, such as policies that would impose a service continuity hardship or create an unnecessary risk of human contact, the public utility should file a request with the Commission for prior approval on an expedited basis.

At the end of the State of Emergency, customers having arrearages accrued during the State of Emergency shall be provided the opportunity to make a reasonable payment arrangement over no less than a six month period and shall not be charged any late fees for late payment for arrearages accrued during the State of Emergency. No provision in this Order shall be construed as relieving a customer of their obligation to pay bills for receipt of any utility service covered by this Order.

If a public utility subject to this Order maintains a website, such public utility shall provide notice of this Order's content on such website. Further, each public utility subject to this Order shall provide notice of this Order's content by posting physically where the company does business with its customers.This Order is effective on the date issued, and the Chief Clerk shall serve this Order by electronic mail on all electric, natural gas, and

water and wastewater public utilities, including resellers, subject to the Commission's jurisdiction.

IT IS, THEREFORE, SO ORDERED.

ISSUED BY ORDER OF THE COMMISSION.

This the 19th day of March, 2020.

NORTH CAROLINA UTILITIES COMMISSION

Kimberley A. Campbell, Chief Clerk