STATE OF WASHINGTON
OFFICE OF GOVERNOR JAY INSLEE

PROCLAMATION BY THE GOVERNOR
AMENDING AND EXTENDING EMERGENCY
PROCLAMATIONS 20-05 and 20-23, et seq.

20-23.15
Ratepayer Assistance and Preservation of Essential Services

WHEREAS, on February 29, 2020, I issued Proclamation 20-05, proclaiming a State of Emergency for all counties throughout Washington State of as a result of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak in the United States and confirmed person-to-person spread of COVID-19 in Washington State; and

WHEREAS, as a result of the continued worldwide spread of COVID-19, its significant progression in Washington State, and the high risk it poses to our most vulnerable populations, I have subsequently issued several amendatory proclamations, exercising my emergency powers under RCW 43.06.220 by prohibiting certain activities and waiving and suspending specified laws and regulations; and

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 disease, caused by a virus that spreads easily from person to person which may result in serious illness or death and has been classified by the World Health Organization as a worldwide pandemic, continues to broadly spread throughout Washington State, significantly increasing the threat of serious associated health risks statewide; and

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a global economic slowdown and an economic downturn in Washington State, resulting in layoffs and reduced work hours for a significant percentage of our workforce and significant reductions in business activity impacting our commercial sectors that support our state's economic vitality, including severe impacts to the large number of small businesses that make Washington State's economy thrive; and

WHEREAS, the available financial resources of many of our people and businesses are becoming limited with many of them suffering considerable economic hardship as a result of the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on our economy, resulting in a significant threat of utility services being disconnected and late payment fees being imposed; and

WHEREAS, maintaining provision of utility services during this crisis is an essential tool in sustaining and protecting the health and welfare of our people and businesses as a critical part of the overall response to the COVID-19 pandemic; and

WHEREAS, the Washington State Utilities and Transportation Commission regulates the rates and services of investor-owned utilities in Washington State and is coordinating with utilities throughout the State to protect the availability and affordability of essential utility services for those economically impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic through a variety of measures, including: suspending disconnection of utilities for nonpayment, waiving late fees, working with affected utility customers to

establish payment arrangements, and improving access to energy assistance for affected customers; and

WHEREAS, Washington State Utilities and Transportation Commission issued a moratorium for disconnections for nonpayment through April 30, 2021, at which time the Commission will evaluate health and economic data to determine whether things have improved enough to lift the moratorium; and

WHEREAS, on March 18, 2020, I issued Proclamation 20-23, waiving and suspending statutes and prohibiting certain activities relating to utility services; and

WHEREAS, on March 24, 2020, I issued Proclamation 20-23.1, amending and continuing the waivers and suspension of statutes and the prohibitions of certain activities relating to utility services; and

WHEREAS, under the provisions of RCW 43.06.220(4), the statutory waivers and suspensions in Proclamations 20-23, et seq., have been periodically extended by the leadership of the Washington State Senate and House of Representatives, and which I acknowledged and similarly extended the prohibitions therein; and

WHEREAS, on January 15, 2021, under the provisions of RCW 43.06.220(4), the statutory waivers and suspensions of Proclamation 20-23, et seq., were extended by Senate Concurrent Resolution 8402 until the termination of the state of emergency pursuant to RCW 43.06.210, or until rescinded, whichever occurs first; and

WHEREAS, to fully extend Proclamations 20-23, et seq., it is also necessary for me to extend the prohibitions therein; and

WHEREAS, the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic and its progression throughout Washington State continues to threaten the life and health of our people as well as the economy of Washington State, and remains a public disaster affecting life, health, property or the public peace; and

WHEREAS, the Washington State Department of Health continues to maintain a Public Health Incident Management Team in coordination with the State Emergency Operations Center and other supporting state agencies to manage the public health aspects of the incident; and

WHEREAS, the Washington State Military Department Emergency Management Division, through the State Emergency Operations Center, continues coordinating resources across state government to support the Washington State Department of Health and local health officials in alleviating the impacts to people, property, and infrastructure, and continues coordinating with the Department of Health in assessing the impacts and long-term effects of the incident on Washington State and its people.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Jay Inslee, Governor of the state of Washington, as a result of the above-noted situation, and under Chapters 38.08, 38.52 and 43.06 RCW, do hereby proclaim that a State of Emergency continues to exist in all counties of Washington State, that Proclamation 20-05 and all amendments thereto remain in effect, and that Proclamations 20-05 and 20-23, et seq., are amended to (1) recognize the extension of statutory waivers and suspensions therein by the Washington State Legislature until termination of the State of Emergency pursuant to RCW 43.06.210, or until rescinded,

whichever occurs first, and (2) similarly extend the prohibitions therein until the termination of the State of Emergency or until rescinded, whichever occurs first.

I again direct that the plans and procedures of the *Washington State Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan* be implemented throughout state government. State agencies and departments are directed to continue utilizing state resources and doing everything reasonably possible to support implementation of the *Washington State Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan* and to assist affected political subdivisions in an effort to respond to and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

I continue to order into active state service the organized militia of Washington State to include the National Guard and the State Guard, or such part thereof as may be necessary in the opinion of The Adjutant General to address the circumstances described above, to perform such duties as directed by competent authority of the Washington State Military Department in addressing the outbreak. Additionally, I continue to direct the Washington State Department of Health, the Washington State Military Department Emergency Management Division, and other agencies to identify and provide appropriate personnel for conducting necessary and ongoing incident related assessments.

ACCORDINGLY, in recognition of the above findings, and to help preserve and maintain life, health, property or the public peace under RCW 43.06.220(1)(h), I prohibit all energy, telecommunications, and water providers in Washington State from conducting the following activities:

(1) Disconnecting any residential customers from energy, telecommunications, or water service due to nonpayment on an active account, except at the request of the customer.
(2) Refusing to reconnect any residential customer who has been disconnected due to nonpayment;
(3) Charging fees for late payment or reconnection of energy, telecommunications, or water service; and
(4) Disconnecting service to any residential customer who has contacted the utility to request assistance from the utility's COVID-19 Customer Support Program.

These prohibitions on disconnecting, refusing to reconnect, and charging late fees in this proclamation, as amended, are extended until termination of the COVID-19 State of Emergency or 11:59 p.m. on July 31, 2021, whichever comes first.

Citizens encountering financial difficulties should reach out to their local utility providers. Most utilities have adopted policies that can help with delinquent bills and ensure continued service after the moratorium expires.

FURTHERMORE, it is the intent of this order to ensure that vulnerable populations and households retain access to essential services while they are experiencing financial hardship caused by layoffs, reduced hours, or other circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Access to these services is critical to ensure the safety and health of our communities during this crisis. This order therefore acknowledges the role that the public and private utilities subject to this order play in protecting the health and well-being of our communities and families; and expresses gratitude for their voluntary efforts to support customers during this crisis.

ADDITIONALLY, I want to thank the vast majority of utility customers who have continued to pay what they can, as soon as they can, to help support the people and the systems that are supporting them

through this crisis. The intent of Proclamation 20-23, et seq., is to provide relief to those individuals who have been impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. This Proclamation does not relieve customer from the obligation to pay for utility services. Customers and utilities are expected to continue to communicate in good faith with one another, and to work together, on the timing and terms of payment and repayment solutions. Utilities should prioritize use of customer support tools, particularly those that have accrued extensive utility bill arrearages, prior to the end of the moratorium, in order to help avoid credit and collections issues.

Violators of this order may be subject to criminal penalties pursuant to RCW 43.06.220(5).

Signed and sealed with the official seal of the state of Washington on this 18th day of March, A.D., Two Thousand and Twenty-One at Olympia, Washington.

By:

/s/
Jay Inslee, Governor

BY THE GOVERNOR:

/s/
Secretary of State