For Immediate Release: 03/13/2020

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Utilities to Suspend Disconnections for Households Facing Hardships During COVID-19 Outbreak

Department to Work with Utilities to Ensure Vulnerable Customers Keep Their Power, Heat, and Water Services on for the Duration of the Outbreak

ALBANY — In response to Governor Andrew M. Cuomo's directive, the New York State Department of Public Service announced today that it would immediately work with utilities across the State to ensure any customers affected by COVID-19 restrictions they will not lose power or heat due to financial hardship. The State's major electric, gas, and water utilities will take immediate action to suspend service shutoffs to households during the COVID-19 outbreak.

"Ensuring affordable, safe, secure, and reliable access to electric, gas, and water services for New York State's residential and business consumers is at the heart of everything we do," **said Department CEO John B. Rhodes.** "By suspending utility disconnects we are ensuring that those affected by the virus will not have to worry about keeping critical utility services available."

The State's major electric and gas utilities — Con Edison, National Grid, Central Hudson, Orange and Rockland, New York State Electric and Gas, Rochester Electric and Gas, PSEG Long Island and National Fuel Gas — and major private water companies have all committed to suspend shut-offs for customers, and assist customers impacted by COVID-19 who may be experiencing financial hardship that makes it difficult for them to pay their utility bills during the outbreak.

Historically, the Department has asked the utilities for more lenient repayment options during times of hardship. For example, every year during the coldest parts of the winter the major electric and gas utilities suspend service terminations for non-payment. Similar action was taken during Super Storm Sandy, the 2014 Polar Vortex, and the 2008 financial crisis.

AARP New York State Director Beth Finkel said: "Ensuring that New Yorkers facing hardship during the coronavirus outbreak will continue receiving the energy they rely on is sensible, compassionate, and necessary. AARP New York commends the leadership of Governor Cuomo and the Department of Public Service to ensure uninterrupted power to those already facing great challenges during these difficult times."

Richard Berkley, Executive Director of the Public Utility Law Project of New York, said: "Today the Governor continues to lead in protecting New Yorkers against unprecedented threats and the potential harms that could arise without protections against water, heat, and electric shutoffs. Utility customers deserve the assurance that they will have access to essential utility services during the

COVID-19 pandemic, and PULP commends the Governor, the Department of Public Service, and utilities for today's action to do just that."

New York's healthcare system is the best in the world, and State agencies are prioritizing testing, containment tracking and quarantine protocols to keep New Yorkers safe during this period. Please visit the Department of Health's Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) webpage for the most up-to-date information.

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