

STATE OF VERMONT
PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION

Case No. 20-0703-PET

Vermont Legal Aid request for moratorium on utility and telecommunications shutoffs during State of Emergency	
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Order entered: 09/23/2020

**ORDER EXTENDING DISCONNECTION MORATORIUM AND ALLOWING FOR
RESPONSE COMMENTS FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SERVICE**

This proceeding concerns a petition from Vermont Legal Aid to the Vermont Public Utility Commission (“Commission”) requesting the temporary halt of involuntary utility disconnections during the state of emergency in Vermont because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In today’s Order, we extend the temporary moratorium on involuntary utility disconnections until October 15, 2020, and we grant the Vermont Department of Public Service (“Department”) leave to file response comments by September 25, 2020.

I. BACKGROUND

In earlier orders, the Commission granted Vermont Legal Aid’s request and put in place a temporary disconnection moratorium that is set to expire on September 30, 2020.

On September 3, 2020, we issued an Order seeking comments from participants on whether to extend the moratorium beyond September 30, 2020, on whether any extension should apply to the same group of utilities currently covered by the moratorium, and on what consumer protection measures should be in place at the end of the temporary moratorium.

On September 17, 2020, the Commission received comments from the Department; the Vermont Public Power Supply Authority; Vermont Legal Aid; the Town of Stowe Electric Department; Green Mountain Power Corporation; MCI Communications Services, Inc., doing business as Verizon Business Services, and MCI Metro Access Transmission Services, Inc. doing business as Verizon Access Services; the City of Burlington Electric Department; Vermont

Electric Cooperative, Inc.; Consolidated Communications; Vermont Gas Systems, Inc.; and the eight Vermont rural local exchange carriers.¹

On September 21, 2020, the Village of Hyde Park Electric Department filed its comments.

II. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The Department recommends extending the moratorium “until October 15, 2020, consistent with the Governor’s most recent extension of the state of emergency.”² The Department also requests “that it be permitted to submit comments on the September 17, 2020, utility submissions on September 23, 2020.”³ According to the Department, extending the temporary moratorium “until October 15 and allowing the Department to file detailed comments and recommendations on each utility submission will give the necessary time for the Commission to consider any actions that it needs to order in conjunction with lifting the Moratorium.”⁴

We agree with the Department that it would be helpful to have the Department’s response to the detailed utility submissions we received last week. For this reason, as well as the reasons we have provided in our previous orders granting or extending the temporary moratorium, we grant a brief extension of the moratorium to October 15, 2020, and permit the Department to file by September 25, 2020, any response comments to the September 17, 2020, and September 21, 2020, utility submissions.

Once we receive the Department’s response comments, we will address those comments and all of the September 17 and 21, 2020, comments in a future order on whether to extend the temporary moratorium beyond October 15, 2020, to which utilities any such extension would apply, and consumer protections and other matters raised in the comments received to date.

As the Department prepares its comments on the utilities’ submissions, we note that it would be helpful to hear an update from the Department on its Vermont Covid-19 Arrearage

¹ Franklin Telephone Company, Inc.; Ludlow Telephone Company doing business as TDS Telecom; Northfield Telephone Company doing business as TDS Telecom; Perkinsville Telephone Company, Inc. doing business as TDS Telecom; Shoreham Telephone LLC doing business as Otelco; Topsham Telephone Company, Inc.; Vermont Telephone Company, Inc. doing business as VTel; and Waitsfield-Fayston Telephone Company, Inc. doing business as Waitsfield Telecom, doing business as Champlain Valley Telecom.

² Department Comments at 1.

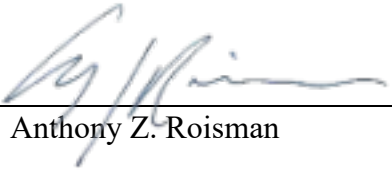
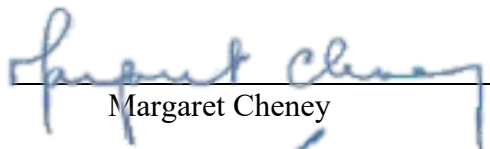
³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

Assistance Program (“VCAAP”), and how that program is being implemented. Specifically, if the Department wishes to highlight any actions the Commission can take in this proceeding that would advance the VCAAP’s goals and would maximize the use of those funds for qualifying customers, we would welcome those comments. It would also aid the Commission to hear from the Department about what might happen to any VCAAP funds that have not been expended when the program closes on November 30, 2020.

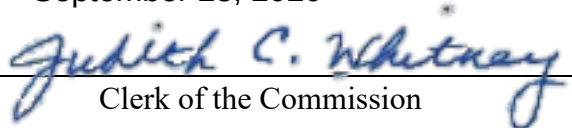
SO ORDERED.

Dated at Montpelier, Vermont, this 23rd day of September, 2020.

 _____ Anthony Z. Roisman	)	PUBLIC UTILITY
	)	
 _____ Margaret Cheney	)	
	)	COMMISSION
	)	
 _____ Sarah Hofmann	)	OF VERMONT

OFFICE OF THE CLERK

Filed: September 23, 2020

Attest: 
Clerk of the Commission

Notice to Readers: This decision is subject to revision of technical errors. Readers are requested to notify the Clerk of the Commission (by e-mail, telephone, or in writing) of any apparent errors, in order that any necessary corrections may be made. (E-mail address: puc.clerk@vermont.gov)

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