

May 28, 2020



**FROM THE DESK OF
COMMISSIONER
BRENT BAILEY
CENTRAL DISTRICT OFFICE**



The Central District is pleased to bring you the latest information concerning utility rates, project developments, Public Service Commission actions and other news you can use. I hope you will find this information to be a useful resource to learn about the Public Service Commission, consumer issues and the continuous work we are doing for the citizens in the Central District and across the state of Mississippi. Thank you again for allowing me to serve you in this capacity.

Brent Bailey



Entering the Next Phase of Customer Assistance

On Tuesday, May 26 at 5 p.m., the Commission's [Order](#) temporarily suspending the disconnection of utility services due to non-payment expired. For 71 days, at the height of the Governor's shelter-in-place proclamation and later followed by the safer-at-home directives, the Commission's Order acted to maintain a safe and healthy home environment, aimed to help stop the transmission of the virus, as well as protect those citizens feeling the financial hardships of the economic slowdown.

The Commission determined that access to utility services including water, sewer, natural gas, and electricity is in the public interest and is vital to ensuring the protection of public health and safety and for the promotion of the general welfare. Therefore, because of the State of Emergency across Mississippi due to the coronavirus, the Mississippi Public Service Commission saw fit to make the now-expired Order applicable to every electric, natural gas, water and sewer company operating in the state - even those utilities that the Commission would not regulate under normal circumstances.

While there were a few initial misunderstandings regarding the applicability of the Commission's Order, utilities across the state implemented protocols and procedures to suspend service disconnections. I want to thank the utilities all across the state for abiding by the Order and for their patience and understanding in this time of national and state health emergency. These collective actions help to keep citizens and utility employees safe and healthy.

The Commission and the utilities understand that many Mississippians have lost their jobs since mid-March or have suffered other economic disruption. This caused some households (and some businesses) to accumulate utility debt throughout the crisis. However, to maintain a safe, healthy and secure home, we have strongly encouraged utilities to offer a range of bill payment assistance options that provide flexibility and certainty and that allows a customer to retain access to services while reducing any outstanding account balances.

BEFORE THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION
OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI

MISSISSIPPI PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION DOCKET NO. 2018-AD-141

IN RE: MISSISSIPPI PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION
OMNIBUS DOCKET

ORDER TEMPORARILY SUSPENDING
DISCONNECTION OF CERTAIN UTILITY SERVICES

COMES NOW the Mississippi Public Service Commission ("Commission"), *sua sponte*, and temporarily suspends the disconnection of certain utility services,¹ and in support thereof, the Commission finds as follows, to wit:

- 1) On March 14, 2020, the Governor of the State of Mississippi declared a State of Emergency in an effort to stem the transmission of the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19. In that declaration, the Governor ordered that "[p]ursuant to Miss. Code Ann. § 33-15-11(e)(1) the provisions of state statutes, rules, regulations or orders may be temporarily suspended or modified if compliance with such provisions would prevent, hinder, or delay action necessary to cope with this outbreak."²

¹ Mississippi is not alone in the fight to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19 by suspending utility service disconnections. According to the Energy Policy Institute, seven (7) other states, and numerous other jurisdictions, have suspended utility service disconnections for non-payment of services as a result of this virus: <https://www.energyandpolicy.org/utilities-disconnections-coronavirus/>.

² Exec. Order, State of Miss. (March 15, 2020).



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If you or a family member or friend have a past-due utility bill(s), the Commission requests that you first reach out to that utility and try to come to terms on a workable payment plan. If an agreeable solution can not be reached, you can contact the Commission and we will take steps to assist you in the negotiations. **Central District customers can contact my office at 800-356-6430 or 601-961-5477.**

The Commission established a portal on its website that contains links and information on state and federal financial assistance programs and information on the payment assistance programs being offered by utilities for the benefit of customers. Please see our [Utility Bill Payment Assistance](#) page.



Long-Term Solutions for Improving Household Resilience Needed

Even before the COVID-19 crisis, one-third of American households struggled to pay their utility bills, some having to choose among key necessities such as food, medicine, and keeping the lights on. Now as the COVID-19 public health emergency weighs on our state and national economy and people continue to shelter-in-place, household energy and water costs are expected to rise, adding another stressor to home budgets.

For Mississippi, it is estimated that 17 percent of households – or over 225,000 total households – will face significant economic disruption. The average monthly cost of utilities for a typical Mississippi household is estimated to be \$311. For a low-income household, this represents at least 14 percent of their total income--significantly greater than the 6 percent of a household's income that is commonly held as the threshold for a high energy burden. The utility debt for those 17 percent of Mississippi households facing economic disruption could total near \$70 million each month.

While the Commission's disconnection moratorium provided some short-term relief from loss of utility services, the debts from recurring non-payment continue to mount. As discussed above, we are working with utilities across the state to create reasonable payment plans for customers who have gotten behind on their bills.

However, utilities can also use the information collected from customers to help design programs and measures that reduce energy and water usage and thus reduce utility bills and minimize instances of energy burden on customers. Demand-side management programs, specifically energy efficiency programs, can make homes more energy efficient or reduce energy usage at peak times.

Over the long-term, customers need access to solutions that will reduce energy burdens, lower utility bills and stimulate economic growth in the state. I look forward to working with a wide range of stakeholders to propose, evaluate, develop and implement strategies and programs that improve the resilience of Mississippi families and small businesses.



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Last Week at the MPSC

- The National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC) announced that its Summer Policy Summit will be held virtually from July 20-22. Topics will include the effects of the pandemic across regulated communities, ISO-RTO markets, clean energy, distribution planning, federal updates, cybersecurity, telecommunications and more.
- The Commission [moved to suspend](#) the Oakview Utility Notice of Intent to provide the Public Utilities Staff more time to investigate the proposed rates and lawfulness of the filing.
- Cane Creek Solar, LLC filed a [Petition for CPCN](#) for the construction, ownership and operation of a 78.5 MW_{AC} (105 MW_{DC}) [solar photovoltaic energy generation facility](#) in Clarke County, MS. The Facility will be comprised of approximately 265,000 400-Watt photovoltaic modules, as well as corresponding inverters, racking structures, tracking systems, and transformer. The Facility intends to sell wholesale energy, and potentially other project attributes, to one or more electric utilities pursuant to a power purchase agreement at rates competitive with traditional resources. Total investment will be approximately \$80 million. Approximately 300 jobs are expected to be created during construction. The project is expected to be in operation by the end of 2022.
- Moonshot Solar, LLC filed a [Petition for CPCN](#) for the construction, ownership and operation of a 78.5 MW_{AC} (105 MW_{DC}) [solar photovoltaic energy generation facility](#) in Hancock County, MS. The Facility will be comprised of approximately 265,000 400-Watt photovoltaic modules, as well as corresponding inverters, racking structures, tracking systems, and transformer. The Facility intends to sell wholesale energy, and potentially other project attributes, to one or more electric utilities pursuant to a power purchase agreement at rates competitive with traditional resources. Total investment will be approximately \$80 million. Approximately 300 jobs are expected to be created during construction. The project is expected to be in operation by the end of 2022.
- 4-County EPA filed a [Motion to Proceed](#) with adjudication of Declaratory Opinion against Entergy MS. 4-County Electric Power Association and Entergy MS are in disagreement over whether Entergy MS has the legal right to “self-serve” the Choctaw Generating Facility with power not purchased from 4-County.
- The [Utility Docket](#) for the June 9, 2020 Regular Meeting of the MPSC was posted.



Last week, our Consumer Complaint Specialists handled a total of **16** complaints in the Central District.

Electric Companies	12
Telecommunications	2
Water/Sewage	2

Last week, the Central District received a total of **34** complaints from consumers against potential telemarketers through our no call app, website and mail-ins. The top three general issues reported by consumers are related to insurance, credit cards and auto warranties.

The [Federal Trade Commission](#) recently sent joint letters with the [Federal Communications Commission](#) to three companies providing Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) services, warning them that routing and transmitting illegal coronavirus-related scam robocalls is itself illegal and may lead to federal law enforcement against them. The warning letters are part of a coordinated campaign to combat illegal telemarketing. Learn more about consumer topics and [file a consumer complaint](#) online or by calling 1-877-FTC-HELP (382-4357). Read more about the recent letters: <https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/press-releases/2020/05/ftc-fcc-send-joint-letters-additional-voip-providers-warning>

We encourage consumers to file telemarketing complaints with the Federal Trade Commission at <http://www.donotcall.gov/> in addition to filing complaints with the Mississippi Public Service Commission.