

## Massaro, Luly (PUC)

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**From:** Camilo Viveiros <camiloviveiros@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, July 3, 2020 9:34 AM  
**To:** Massaro, Luly (PUC)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] : Re: Dear Chairperson Curran and Interim Administrator George RE: Utility Relief

Hi Luly,

Please include the below letter signed by 23 organizations in Docket 5022 organizational comments.

Thank you,  
Camilo Viveiros  
George Wiley Center

On Wed, May 20, 2020 at 6:01 PM Camilo Viveiros <[camiloviveiros@gmail.com](mailto:camiloviveiros@gmail.com)> wrote:

Chairperson of the Rhode Island Public Utilities Commission Margaret Curran and Interim Administrator/Deputy Chief Of Legal Services the Rhode Island Division of Public Utilities Linda George

RE: Real Utility Relief Is Still Needed in Rhode Island

We are organizations from across the state who are concerned by how the PUC invited National Grid to propose their own “sensible and flexible” payment plans rather than instructing them to implement a percentage of income plan to assist struggling families.

Now is the time for our public officials to step up and stand up for the public, not stand back and give away policy making power to corporations. We find it irresponsible to allow for utilities to make their own self-interested proposals for payment plans. The RI PUC shouldn't delegate their authority to propose and set policy. During the open meeting on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020, PUC Chair Curran said that the utilities know their customers better, putting utilities in the driver's seat to steer public policy. Commissioners are appointed to make policy not hand over policy making power to profit making companies. The Chair of the PUC went on to say that making collection plans after the moratorium “is not something that is appropriate for certainly not something that the PUC come up with. I think we want to encourage the utilities to exercise their own, you know, best interests here.” If the end result is deferring to utility company developed plans the PUC undermines the balance between utility companies and utility customers that they are supposed to advocate toward.

The PUC directed regulated utilities to provide to the Division, with a copy to the PUC, plans to offer sensible and flexible payment arrangements by Friday May 15, 2020. The PUC should extend the time for proposed plans to allow for consumer groups and others to bring forward plans that will reflect the unique needs of customers at this time. As the

regulator charged with protecting the public the PUC should urge National Grid to submit a payment plan that includes the return of the Percentage Income Payment Plan (PIPP).

The PUC has received hundreds of letters and testimonies in support of PIPP and they know that PIPP has been crafted with the assistance of national experts. The George Wiley Center's proposal of a Percentage Income Plan is based on what is in place in other states where Public Utility Commissions played positive roles in establishing such plans. At this critical time, perhaps more than ever before, a percentage of income payment plan that would allow for low-income households to pay an affordable percentage of their income toward utilities is the only meaningful long-term response to the economic crisis all Rhode Islanders find themselves in. We know that based on all projections it will be a year or two before newly unemployed Rhode Islanders are back to work. Even then utilities will be unaffordable for some Rhode Islanders who will never be able to pay more than a percentage of their income.

During the PUC open meeting Chair Curran also said that she wanted "to make sure that we make it clear to utilities that we trust them to manage their own business that they understand the most effective way to address these problems that they are having currently themselves and that their customers are having". We strongly disagree that the role of the PUC is to display "trust" or think that is proper to allow for National Grid to propose their own plans for us to be subjected to. The PUC and the Division should not serve as a rubber stamp to plans proposed by National Grid but should provide critical oversight and set policy on important issues such as the implementation of a percentage of income payment plan.

Now it the time for public officials to step up to respond to our community's needs, not to hand over decisions to corporations that don't share the public's interests. Low-income utility customers have been paying disproportionate percentages of their income toward utilities for decades compared to other states. A step toward fairer utility payment plans would be to bring back a percentage of income payment plan. Fortunately, we do not need legislation to implement such a plan and National Grid, the PUC and the Division can work together to immediately implement such a plan in the face of the current crisis.

Unemployment is highest since the Great Depression, now is the time to push those with the most to do their part to assist others. During this historic crisis it is important to reset tariffs to increase holding corporations more socially responsibility by decreasing profit margins.

Now is the time for the Division, the PUC, the Governor and Director of the Department of Health to demand that National Grid voluntarily agree to a tiered income sensitive plan that would consider people's income when setting the costs of their utilities. Otherwise the displacement and public health challenges that will ensue for a large number of unemployed customers who are unable to pay their utility bills will be dangerous for all Rhode Islanders.

We had a Percentage Income Payment Plan in Rhode for years and during the historic crisis it is time for everyone to make utilities more affordable and accessible. We must heed the lessons of the pandemic by assuring people have access to essential utilities for health and hygiene, communication, safety, work, study and survival. Decisions over the next few weeks will mean the difference between life or death in the future for low-income Rhode Islanders. This is a moment that we will remember for our lifetimes whether officials stand up or stand by placing corporate interests over the public interest.

Finally, we also advocate that CARES ACT funding be used to cancel debt and pay bills of low-income and unemployed utility consumers. With deep unemployment and unfair rate structures it would only be responsible to assist struggling utility consumers to avoid increasing energy insecurity because of the pandemic and economic depression.

Sincerely,  
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*The George Wiley Center, a statewide grassroots anti-poverty organizing group that focuses on energy, economic and racial justice.*

Climate Action Rhode Island

The Collective North Kingston, RI

Community Health Innovations of Rhode Island

DARE (Direct Action for Rights and Equality)

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Providence, RI

House of Hope CDC

Medical Legal Partnership

Nature's Trust Rhode Island

Never Again Rhode Island

PAIMI (Protection and Advocacy for Mental Ill)

PRYSM (Providence Youth Student Movement)

Rhode Island Interfaith Coalition to Reduce Poverty

Rhode Island Childhood Lead Action Project

Rhode Island Pax Christi

Rhode Island Peoples Assembly

Rhode Island Poor Peoples Campaign

Rhode Island Rosa Parks Human Rights Committee

Rhode Island Unemployed Council

RIOT Rhode Island (formerly Girls Rock! Rhode Island)

Showing Up for Racial Justice Rhode Island

Sista Fire Rhode Island

The Womxn Projext

CC Governor Gina Raimondo, Congressman David Cicilline, Congressman James Langevin, Congressman Jack Reed, and Congressman Sheldon Whitehouse