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December 14, 2020

Missouri Public Service Commission
200 Madison Street, PO Box 360
Jefferson City, MO 65102

Dear Chairman Silvey and Commissioners,

Operation Food Search is writing in support of an emergency order for a utility disconnection moratorium through March 31, 2021 in order to protect the health of Missourians during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Operation Food Search is a hunger relief organization based in St. Louis that distributes more than \$3 million of food to 200,000 people each month. We have provided an additional two million meals to the community during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, Missouri's food insecurity rate increased by over 20 percent and is driven by unprecedented unemployment and poverty rates. Many who are most impacted by the economic recession are also likely to be at high risk for severe COVID-19 health impacts.¹

In addition to emergency food distribution, Operation Food Search delivers innovative Fresh Rx programs that combine weekly family meal kit deliveries with nutrition education and comprehensive case management to low-income families in the St. Louis region. Throughout the pandemic, we have been helping families enroll in public assistance, connecting them to community resources, and providing household essentials. During COVID-19, nearly two-thirds of people enrolled in Fresh Rx have experienced job loss or reduced hours as a result of the pandemic. Participants also report having to make tradeoffs in paying for basic needs such as food, medicine, utilities, and rent based on limited income that is available each month.

Many Fresh Rx families have been unable to consistently pay monthly utility bills, accumulating significant outstanding balances as a result. They are now fearful that their housing and utilities will be at risk as companies end pandemic-related grace periods even though their unemployment persists. Further, our families are concerned about their health and risking exposure to COVID-19. Utility disconnections will limit their ability to practice recommended public health measures at a time when infections are spreading at record levels. In particular, those who lose heat during the winter will have to seek shelter with family and friends which does not allow for social distancing.

Families across Missouri are facing similar circumstances due to the current public health and economic crisis. **Operation Food Search strongly recommends that the Missouri Public Service Commission enact an emergency moratorium on utility disconnections to support the health of all families during this emergency.**

Sincerely,


Trina Ragain
Director of Policy & Innovation

¹ Feeding America (Oct 2020). https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Brief_Local%20Impact_10.2020_0.pdf