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Jewish Community Relations Council of St. Louis

December 14, 2020

Chairman Ryan Silvey and Commissioners
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Dear Chairman and Commissioners,
The Jewish Community Relations Council of St. Louis strongly urge you to consider a moratorium on winter utility disconnections. Judaism teaches the importance of caring for the sick and that supports emergency policies aimed to protect public health. The Jewish tradition understands caring for the sick as one of only three commandments that we learn directly from God, who visits Abraham directly when he is ill. To care for those who are suffering is an act of the Divine. At this time, when COVID-19 is ravaging communities across Missouri, it is crucial to remember these teachings and use them to guide our actions.

This is a public health issue that is vital to suppressing COVID-19 transmission. A moratorium on utility shut off makes it more likely that people can stay in their homes, which is a key strategy to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This is clear from the various shelter in place and social distancing orders that local governments have enacted to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The Public Service Commission has the power to intervene when public health is at stake and that time is now.

Recent research, including this study from Duke University, shows that "eviction, electricity, and water utility moratoria have played an important role in containing the COVID-19 pandemic and.....should be carefully considered." Please understand that this is truly an emergency and decisive action is needed to help keep people in their homes and prevent the spread of the virus. It will take all of us, from individual responsibility to legislative and executive action to help stop the spread of the virus. And Missourians know that stopping the spread of the virus is the key first step before any economic recovery can take place. Thank you for considering this matter.

Sincerely,

Rori Picker Neiss
Executive Director

Cheryl Adelstein
Deputy Director

