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# METROPOLITAN ST. LOUIS EQUAL HOUSING AND OPPORTUNITY COUNCIL

*Working to ensure equal access to housing and places of public accommodation for all people*

December 14, 2020

Chairman Ryan Silvey and Commissioners  
Missouri Public Service Commission  
200 Madison Street, PO Box 360  
Jefferson City, MO 65102-0360

Dear Chairman and Commissioners,

The Metropolitan St Louis Equal Housing and Opportunity Council (EHOC) writes in support of an emergency order that would create a winter utility disconnection moratorium. Founded in 1992, EHOC is a nonprofit fair housing organization working in the St. Louis metropolitan region. Our mission is to ensure equal access to housing for all people through education, counseling, investigation, and enforcement.

A critical part of EHOC's work is providing information and counseling to tenants about their rights, including information fact sheets and education about the Fair Housing Act and Landlord Tenant Law. In response to the COVID-19 eviction crisis, EHOC created a new eviction defense program to provide legal support to eligible tenants facing eviction or risk of eviction. Since August 2020, this program has worked with nearly 400 callers. A critical factor in protecting tenants from eviction and homelessness is a moratorium on utility disconnections.

The economic impact of COVID-19 has further exacerbated challenges of utility costs, which for many cases has been the significant factor in families being forced out of the homes. This causes families to stay in overcrowded spaces or to stay on the streets. Neither homelessness nor overcrowding promote sheltering in place, hand hygiene, and other practices that public health officials recommend during this time of near-capacity hospital occupancy and very high rates of coronavirus transmission.

A moratorium on utility disconnections through the winter will help stop the spread of COVID-19 in our state. We urge you to take action and protect public health under your authority granted in under RSMo § 386.310.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Will Jordan,  
Executive Director