

Subject Line: Public Comment on Docket # U-200281

Dear Commissioners,

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on Docket # U-200281.

On behalf of Puget Sound Sage, Front and Centered, and the Sierra Club, we thank you for the actions the Commission has taken to ensure our community's access to essential services during the pandemic by extending the moratorium on utility shut-offs until April 30, 2021. We continue to be in coordination and conversation with the Joint Advocates to help advance protections for customers. **Together, we write to urge you to once again demonstrate compassion and save lives during the pandemic by extending the utility shut-off moratorium.**

As we approach the one-year anniversary of the first moratorium on utility shut-offs, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to devastate Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities in Washington state and across the country. Black, Indigenous, Pacific Islander, and Latinx people in our state have been disproportionately diagnosed and hospitalized with COVID-19.¹ Of community members that have been spared from the worst of the virus, many have lost housing and jobs due to the accompanying economic crisis. Although the introduction of a COVID-19 vaccine is promising, white Washington residents have disproportionately benefited from vaccinations, while Black, Latinx, and Pacific Islander community members have received vaccinations at a disproportionately low rate compared to both population and coronavirus rates.² **Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and low-income communities across the state will not have physically or economically recovered from pandemic by April 30, 2021, and the utility shut-off moratorium must be extended to reflect that reality.**

The pandemic has exacerbated existing inequities, making it even more difficult for low-income customers to pay their energy bills – customers who already had limited support structures in place to prevent utility shut-offs before the pandemic disrupted their lives. As long as the pandemic continues, disproportionately impacted low-income people across the state will continue to be overburdened by utility bills. Meanwhile, the five IOUs benefit from the remarkable financial health compared to most businesses since before the pandemic began; the combined energy revenue of all of the parent companies of Washington's energy investor-owned utilities totaled \$26.6 billion in 2019.³ **Simply put, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color families cannot afford to bear the burden of COVID-19 costs when for-profit utilities can afford to use their billions in surplus profits to cover additional costs associated with the pandemic.**

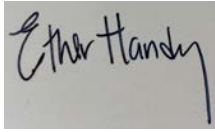
The Commission has an opportunity to execute a positive intervention and improve the lives of our community members during an unprecedentedly challenging time by extending the utility shut-off moratorium. To ensure an equitable recovery, for-profit utilities must share in the sacrifices that are being demanded of us all, and save lives in the process.

¹ <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/COVID19/DataDashboard>

² <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/first-look-at-washingtons-data-on-vaccination-by-race-ethnicity-shows-wide-gaps/>

³ See Puget Sound Sage's research on WA utility pay and profits: <https://www.pugetsoundsage.org/utilities-campaign/>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Esther Handy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'E'.

Esther Handy

Interim Executive Director

Puget Sound Sage

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mariel Thuraingham". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'M'.

Mariel Thuraingham

Clean Energy Policy Lead

Front and Centered

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Julian Aris". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'J'.

Julian Aris

Associate Attorney

Sierra Club h