



Seattle Office: 2800 First Avenue, Suite 252 • Seattle, WA 98121 • (206) 728-2326 • Fax: (206) 728-9772
SeaTac Office: 19415 International Blvd, Suite 313 • SeaTac, WA 98188 • (206) 212-6717
Portland Office: 1125 SE Madison Street, Suite 209 • Portland, OR 97214 • (503) 230-2304 • Fax: (503) 230-0542

Erik Van Rossum
President

Stefan Moritz
Secretary-Treasurer

Jennifer Graham
Vice President, Oregon

September 30, 2020

State of Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission
621 Woodland Square Loop SE
Lacey, WA 98503

RE: Docket # U-200281

Dear Commissioners,

Unite Here Local 8 represents 5,000 hospitality and airport workers across the State of Washington. In the interest of our members, we urge the Commission to require that privately-owned utilities continue Governor Inslee's cut-off moratorium and provide economic relief for those impacted the most by the pandemic.

Our industry has been one of the hardest impacted by the pandemic, with the hospitality sector seeing 188,000 initial unemployment claims filed since March across the state.¹ In King County, where most of our members work, the category of Accommodations and Food Service is the number one industry in total unemployment claims, with 54% of all workers filing for benefits since March.²

This reflects the impacts to our own membership. Roughly 80 percent of the workers we represent are still not back at their jobs, causing a crisis for many families. While Local 8 has fought hard for our members to maintain health care benefits and have supported members in applying for all pandemic relief, many public support programs have ended or are ending. Our out-of-work members are reaching the point of deciding whether to pay bills or buy food.

Our industry is not going to bounce back quickly. The pandemic has caused travel to plummet and hotel vacancy to soar. Even if the rest of Washington's economy begins to recover economically, any vestige of the pandemic will continue to pose health challenges to travel and our industry will struggle.

¹ WA Employment Security Department Unemployment Insurance Benefits Data, <https://public.tableau.com/profile/jeff.robinson#!/vizhome/InitialClaimsapplicationsforUnemploymentInsurance-WA ETA539-/Story1>.

² King County, "Economic, social and overall health impacts," <https://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/health/covid-19/data/impacts/unemployment.aspx>.

For these reasons, we urge the Commission to require the following from your regulated utility companies:

1. Continue Gov. Inslee's moratorium on utility cut-offs until the State is at stage 4 of re-opening, which is the earliest the hotel industry will likely recover.
2. Reconnect any households that have been disconnected for non-payment, without any fees.
3. Provide additional bill assistance so all households that have experienced sudden economic loss can receive support. Many of our members lived in households that did not qualify for bill assistance before the pandemic, but do now.
4. Relieve low-income households of utility debt that has accumulated since the pandemic.
5. Do not report utility non-payment to collections agencies or credit bureaus until the end of the moratorium.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Stefan Moritz
Secretary Treasurer, UNITE HERE Local 8