

United States Senate

Friday, March 13, 2020

NCTA – The Television and Internet Association
25 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Suite 100
Washington, DC 20001

CTIA – The Wireless Association
1400 16th St NW, #600
Washington, DC 20036

NTCA – The Rural Broadband Association
4121 Wilson Boulevard
Arlington, VA 22203

Competitive Carriers Association
601 New Jersey Ave NW, Suite 820
Washington, DC 20001

American Water Works Association
1300 Eye St. NW, Suite 701
Washington, DC 20005

National Rural Water Association
101 Constitution Ave NW, Suite 850
Washington, DC 20001

American Public Power Association
2451 Crystal Drive, Suite 1000
Arlington, VA 22202

National Rural Electric Cooperative
Association
4301 Wilson Blvd,
Arlington, VA 22203

Edison Electric Institute
701 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20004

USTelecom
601 New Jersey Ave NW #600
Washington, DC 20001

Dear leadership of America's major water, electricity, and telecommunications associations:

As associations for the water, electricity, and telecommunications industries, the services your members provide are critical for everyone to have access to as we address the coronavirus pandemic. Clean water is a human right and necessary for hand washing; electricity is vital as public health officials encourage people to stay at home; and access to telecommunications is a critical lifeline for individuals to remain informed and continue to participate in our economy and society as this crisis evolves. In just my state of California, 40 million people will be impacted in some way, whether through themselves or a family member falling ill, work and school closings, travel disruptions, or other unforeseen complications.

As you know, one of the most critical things we can all do right now to stop the spread of the coronavirus is to practice social distancing. By doing so, we can help prevent further transmission of the virus, which is essential to ensuring that our healthcare system is able to effectively treat impacted individuals. However, this means that more and more people are adapting to unique circumstances. In addition to working from home, people are also trying to navigate new challenges, including school closures and caring for loved ones with health needs. We are all reassessing our usual routines and responding to disruptions to daily life on a minute-by-minute basis in order to keep ourselves, and our families safe.

That is why I am asking that you work with your membership to immediately suspend the practice of shutting off services to customers for reasons of nonpayment nationwide. Given the unprecedented challenges people are facing as well as the need for people to access critical services from home in order to stem this crisis, shutting off power, water, or communications services right now just because someone missed a payment is potentially dangerous. It could push individuals to not follow recommended guidelines from public health professionals and further exacerbate this crisis, which would endanger public safety.

We have already seen commendable examples of businesses and other organizations taking actions that will facilitate social distancing, from employers encouraging tele-commuting to businesses expanding paid sick leave to sports leagues cancelling events. We have also seen cities and utilities already take the step of ceasing shutoffs for nonpayment and telecommunications providers waive fees and pledge not to disconnect customers for the next 60 days. I appreciate the fact that these are not easy actions for businesses to take. However, this outbreak poses an existential threat to the health and safety of everyone. As a result, it is incumbent upon all of your members to do their part and ensure nobody loses access to critical services during this serious public health emergency.

Thank you and I request a response by Tuesday, March 17, 2020 at the latest.

Sincerely,



KAMALA D. HARRIS
U.S. Senator