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News Release

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Third Party Electric Supplier Targeting Low-Income Households Amid COVID-19 Crisis

Non-Profit and State Officials Remind Customers to Contact their Utilities Directly with Any Questions about their Bill or Service

HARTFORD, Conn. (March 20, 2020) – As Connecticut responds to the current state of emergency caused by COVID-19, Operation Fuel has received word from one of its intake sites that a third party electric supplier is targeting low-income customers, claiming that Eversource Energy and United Illuminating plan on increasing their charges as a result of COVID-19. There are no current plans to increase customers' generation rates as a result of the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Operation Fuel, the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA), the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), the Connecticut Office of Consumer Counsel, and Attorney General William Tong would like to remind all customers to be aware of potential utility scams to help them avoid becoming victims, and to contact their utility directly if they have any questions about their bills or their service.

“As we continue to address this COVID-19 outbreak, it’s vital for Connecticut residents to have access to basic necessities like running water, heat, and electricity. But consumers should be aware that scammers will use this pandemic as a way to take advantage of the most vulnerable,” said Attorney General William Tong. “It’s vital that we arm consumers with the resources and knowledge they need to protect themselves personally and professionally. If you receive a suspicious phone call, text message, email, or regular mail concerning your utilities, please contact PURA.”

Due to the current COVID-19/Coronavirus public health and safety concerns, effective immediately, PURA will no longer be able to respond to customer complaints and inquiries made to the agency’s toll-free telephone line. All customers are strongly encouraged to file their complaint by utilizing the Authority’s email address, PURA.information@ct.gov or the on-line complaint portal found on the Authority’s website at



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<https://portal.ct.gov/pura>. If you are unable to file a complaint or inquiry electronically, please call either (860) 827-2611 or (860) 827-2698 to leave a message. Your complaint will be responded to in a prompt manner.

PURA has issued a moratorium on shut-offs for electricity, natural gas, and water and has granted a temporary waiver of financial security deposits and balance reduction payments normally required for reconnection of service through May 1, 2020.

"Consumers should contact their utility directly if they have questions or are contacted about their rates or service, if they are currently without utility service and need to get reconnected, or if they have concerns about their ability to pay their bill during this time," said DEEP Commissioner Katie Dykes. "There have been several measures put in place to ensure that customers have access to utility service during this extraordinary public emergency, regardless of their ability to pay, so that they can remain safe and healthy in their homes."

"As we recognize this to be a public health and energy affordability issue, we are doing our best to respond to the needs of our most vulnerable and will continue processing customer requests for fuel and utility assistance for as long as we possibly can," said Brenda Watson, executive director for Operation Fuel. "Unfortunately, scammers will use these uncertain times to benefit from people's anxiety. It is important that customers have the most up-to-date information on these scams and call PURA to submit a formal complaint for the record."

"Unfortunately, unscrupulous actors will seize upon the current public health emergency in a despicable attempt to rip off Connecticut consumers," said Acting Consumer Counsel Richard E. Sobolewski. "Don't fall for it. If you receive a suspicious communication about your utility service, contact PURA so that these scammers can be investigated and ultimately brought to account. The utilities are not disconnecting service during this emergency and are offering increased protections and assistance to their customers. When in doubt, contact your utility company directly for accurate information."

For customers who are currently disconnected from utility service, DEEP advises to contact their utility provider, as reconnect fees have been waived. Watson urged individuals to call 211 or go to www.operationfuel.org for more information on how to apply for assistance.

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