



May 12, 2021

Honorable Mayor Treece and Honorable Members of the City Council:

On January 5, 2021, the City of Columbia Commission on Human Rights voted to send a proposal to Council about concerns regarding delinquent utility accounts and those pending disconnection. The proposal was sent to Council for the January 19, 2021 meeting.

I am writing to check on the status of the Commission's request. Private funding has reduced the acute demand to avoid utility disconnects for the short-term. The Commission, however, is still interested in solutions to systemic problems.

In particular, it appears that the City's requirement to have non-electric charges resolved before citizens can receive outside assistance for electric charges stalls the flow of aid. The Commission requests that the City waive that requirement. A summary of this problem from our previous letter is provided here for your convenience:

*a. Discussion with representatives from Central Missouri Community Action on January 5, 2021, brought forth a concern regarding the disbursement of assistance funds. Current regulations for the LIHEAP program do not allow for agencies like CMCA to assist with utilities such as water, sewer, and solid waste. However, the City currently requires that those non-electric charges must be brought current prior to accepting pledges from CMCA to cover electric charges. This process is cumbersome at best and problematic at worst. Unnecessary restrictions, whether in policy or in ordinance, create barriers to our most vulnerable residents receiving the assistance they need to remain safe and healthy in their homes.*

Other requests in the letter included the following:

1. Waive disconnect and reconnect fees for those households that are at or below 200% of the established Federal Poverty Level (FPL) requirement.
2. Extend the moratorium on utility disconnections for households with school-aged children (this is also in support of a Youth Advisory Council proposal)
3. Increase awareness of and the ability to contribute to the City's CASH and HELP assistance programs.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. We look forward to working with you on actionable steps.

Amanda Hinnant, chair  
City of Columbia Commission on Human Rights