Nov. 2, 2020

Dem Senators Urge Broadband Service Shutoff Suspension

Nine members of the Senate Democratic caucus, led by Sens. Sherrod Brown (D., Ohio) and Jeff Merkley (D., Ore.) have asked some of the largest utility companies in the U.S. — including broadband services providers Comcast Corp., Charter Communications, Inc., AT&T, Inc., Verizon Communications, Inc., T-Mobile US, Inc., Cox Communications, Inc., and Lumen Technologies, Inc. (formerly CenturyLink, Inc.) — to suspend all service shutoffs for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Because of the economic devastation wrought by the pandemic, millions of Americans are struggling to make ends meet and are at risk for having their electricity, water, and broadband services terminated. In order to effectively address the concurrent public health and economic crises, the families you serve must have uninterrupted access to these essential public services,” the lawmakers wrote.

“[A]s millions of children are forced to learn remotely, the internet, like water and electricity, is an essential public service. The Constitution guarantees that every child has the opportunity to access public education. Because of the pandemic, the lack of a reliable internet connection deprives children of that right. Already, 14 percent of school-age children lack access to an internet connection at home. Without a moratorium on electricity and broadband disconnections, many more children, in particular those in minority, low-income, and rural communities, are at risk of falling behind,” they continued.

“We support legislation that would impose a federal moratorium on all utility shutoffs and provide federal government support to utilities for operations as well as customers, in light of declining utility revenues caused by unemployment, small business shutdowns, and rising poverty. In the meantime we ask that you proactively cease all shutoffs by your companies for nonpayment for families dealing with the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic until such time as the President lifts the National Emergency declaration and the states in which you operate have lifted state emergency declarations,” they added.

Joining Sens. Brown and Merkley on the letters were Sens. Chris Van Hollen (D., Md.), Dianne Feinstein (D., Calif.), Ron Wyden (D., Ore.), Bernard Sanders (I., Vt.), Ed Markey (D., Mass.), Elizabeth Warren (D., Mass.), and Tina Smith (D., Minn.). —Lynn Stanton, lynn.stanton@wolterskluwer.com

Copyright © 2020 CCH Incorporated, All Rights Reserved