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Contact: Kerwin Olson, Executive Director (317) 735-7727

Governor Holcomb: Extend Utility Disconnection Moratorium ***CAC Renews Call for Creation of Utility Affordability Task Force***

INDIANAPOLIS – Governor Eric Holcomb must act now to protect vulnerable Hoosier households’ access to home energy by immediately extending the winter disconnection moratorium by at least three months. Indiana’s winter disconnection moratorium protects households receiving assistance or otherwise qualified for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (“LIHEAP”) from energy utility shutoffs between December 1st and March 15th. There is currently a backlog of processing applications for LIHEAP bill assistance due in large part to a significant increase in the number of Hoosier households seeking assistance with their rising utility bills. If the winter disconnection moratorium is not extended past the March 15th deadline, desperately needed bill assistance will likely not be processed in time to prevent a significant amount of utility disconnections and households being left out in the cold.

“It would be unthinkable to disconnect consumers from an essential human service while they are awaiting the assistance they so desperately need,” said Kerwin Olson, Executive Director of CAC. “The Governor should act immediately and extend the winter disconnection moratorium to protect the most vulnerable among us and connect them with the funds available to them. All Hoosiers deserve to live in dignity and have access to essential services.”

Additionally, CAC renews our call on Governor Holcomb to establish a Utility Affordability Task Force with the stated goal of ensuring all Hoosier consumers have uninterrupted access to essential utility services and can remain comfortably and safely in their own homes. “Stories are being told almost daily about Hoosiers struggling to pay their higher-than-normal utility bills, while trying to keep food on the table and a roof over their head. No one should be forced to choose between feeding their families and heating their homes,” added Mr. Olson.

Action is needed to ensure that utility arrearages incurred during the heating session do not trigger mass disconnections by requiring all utility service providers, both regulated and unregulated, to adopt more flexible credit and collection practices than are currently required by state regulations or, in the case of unregulated utilities, their self-governed, internal policies related to credit and collection practices.

Recommended consumer protections should:

- Allow longer and flexible payment plans that are based on the customer’s ability to pay
- Eliminate down payment requirements on payment plans
- Eliminate any requirement that disconnected customers pay the full arrearage amount to reconnect
- Prohibit utilities from imposing late fees and engaging in negative credit reporting
- Eliminate minimum balance requirements for prepaid utility service customers
- Eliminate any customer deposit requirements

“We must begin a collaborative and transparent process with all stakeholders and relevant State agencies at the table. We must thoroughly review the reasons for the affordability crisis that Hoosier consumers currently face and discuss meaningful solutions that will lead to affordable monthly utility bills for all consumers,” concluded Mr. Olson.