



**ASSOCIATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL AUTHORITIES**

2333 Whitehorse-Mercerville Road ▲ Suite 2 Mercerville ▲ NJ 08619-1946  
(609) 584-1877 ▲ Fax: (609) 584-8271 ▲ E-mail: info@aeanj.org ▲ Website: www.aeanj.org

March 21, 2020

The Hon. Vin Gopal  
New Jersey Senate

Re: Proposal to prohibit shutoffs and require reconnection of water and other utility service during a pandemic.

Dear Senator Gopal:

The Association of Environmental Authorities, a trade association representing 85 publicly owned and operating water/wastewater/solid waste local, regional and county agencies, supports the above-referenced bill. Our membership includes 25 drinking water authorities that provide service to more than one million people.

We support the banning of shutoffs. We recognize that reconnection must be indeed a matter of public health and safety and that systems should try their utmost to accomplish this task. However, an unqualified prohibition that does not account for mitigating circumstances could endanger the lives of water system workers, their co-workers, and their families. It could spread COVID-19 or a similar virulent contagion to the utility workers to the extent that there would not be enough staff to run the plant, thereby creating a much more grave public health situation. Utilities could be put between a rock and a hard place, on the one hand required to reconnect, on the other compelled to consider the serious threats to their staff and to the greater public good. This type of dilemma is not speculation; today—now—at the current level of the COVID-19 emergency--regulators and water utilities are already working together to address similar issues.

We would therefore favor language that would acknowledge that difficulty, requiring utilities to restore service to those shutoff for unpaid bills to the best of their ability in circumstances where other factors such as staff safety and maintaining service to the community are relevant.

We thank you, Sen. Gopal, and the New Jersey Legislature for anticipating significant consequences of this unprecedented health emergency and for taking steps to assist New Jerseyans.

Very truly yours,

Peggy Gallos  
Executive Director

Cc

David Smith, PPAG

Dennis Palmer, Chair, AEA Legislative Committee