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September 13, 2021

VIA ELECTRONIC FILING

Will Seuffert

Executive Secretary

Minnesota Public Utilities Commission

121 7th Place E, Suite 350

St. Paul MN 55101

Re: In the Matter of the Inquiry into Actions by Electric and Natural Gas Utilities in Light of the COVID-19  
Pandemic Emergency

Docket No. E,G-999/C1-20-375

Dear Mr. Sueffert,

We at ACER INC (African Career, Education, and Resource Inc.) are writing to request that the Public Utilities Commission modify Order Point 5 from May 26, 2021 to include the COVID-19 Emergency Rental Assistance program as a listed program alongside LIHEAP/EAP prohibiting disconnections of customers with past due balances who have a pending application or have been deemed eligible for assistance for the duration of the transition period (April 30, 2022).

ACER is a field partner with RentHelpMN; on average we assist approximately 20 renters a week with the RentHelpMN application. From the observations gathered after more than a year of assisting renters, it is clear that the PUC should modify Order Point 5. in order to protect the economic stability, health, and safety of renters. Almost all individuals who seek assistance with their RentHelpMN application at ACER are unable to pay both their rent and their utilities bills. For most applicants an average of 3 months passes between filing their application and their initial application review. Because of this long waiting period, many applicants have one or more of their utilities disconnected by the time their application review has begun. Applicants who have their utilities disconnected frequently resort to borrowing money from friends, family, or financial lenders who charge exorbitantly high interest rates—leading to an exacerbation of the renter's financial issues. Even more troublesome, the health and safety of the renters is also jeopardized because without access to electricity or gas, they are unable to do basic functions like cook or protect themselves from harsh weather conditions. With this year's unprecedentedly hot summer, tenants without access to Air Conditioning were at high risk of heat stroke and other health complications. If renters are not protected from having their utilities disconnected this upcoming winter, their health will be at stake as temperatures decrease.

Moreover, lack of access to electricity leads to a stagnation or a decrease in a renter's job or education prospects as an inability to use electronics keeps them from engaging in an increasingly online world. As local schools rely more on virtual education, the inability to use electronics heavily impacts the academic success of renters and their children. Similarly, acquiring or maintaining a job becomes more difficult without the ability of renters to do simple tasks like reply to emails or join virtual meetings.

Besides such issues, having one's utilities disconnected is demoralizing, frightening, and frustrating. For these reasons highlighted above, we urge the PUC to modify Order Point 5 to protect renters seeking rental assistance through RentHelpMN from having their utilities disconnected.

Thank you for your consideration,

**ACER Inc.**