

STATE SENATOR • GILDA Z. JACOBS • 14TH DISTRICT
Jacobs Press Release

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Senate Dems Fight To Protect Consumers From Winter Utility Shutoffs

New legislative package would regulate utility shutoffs, advocate for consumer safety

LANSING- Gilda Z. Jacobs (D-Huntington Woods) and her Senate Democratic colleagues recently announced that they will be introducing a bipartisan legislative package that will protect Michigan residents by banning dangerous winter utility shutoffs and regulating other shutoff practices, including banning the use of service limiters that recently caused the death of a Bay City man.

“Michigan winters can be brutal, and we have to give extra protection from winter utility shutoffs to our vulnerable families and senior citizens,” said Senator Jacobs. “No unpaid utility bill, no matter how high it might be, is worth dying for. This legislation creates policies to follow that will help both the customer and the utility address unpaid bills without putting families in jeopardy during the coldest months of the year.”

The bills in the shutoff protection plan will:

- Permanently outlaw winter shutoffs for all utilities from Dec. 1 to March 31.
- Require a utility company to give all customers at least 15 days notice before shutoff through a certified letter or delivery of a shutoff notice in person before cutting power.
- Ban the use of an electric service limiter in Michigan until the Michigan Public Service Commission (PSC) is able to develop proper, uniform standards regarding their use.
- Expand the authority of the PSC to include all utilities, including municipalities, for regulating shutoffs.

The package will also require a utility provider to include information on government, company or other assistance programs that are available with any utility service shutoff notice, and establish penalties for improperly shutting off a utility service. This may include a fine to the utility company that goes into the Low Income & Energy Efficiency Fund, which provides shutoff and other protections for low-income consumers and promotes energy efficiency, as well as possibly ordering a customer refund.

The need for the legislature to act swiftly to protect Michigan residents during the brutally cold winter months hopes to prevent tragedies like the death of Marvin Schur, a 93-year-old World War II veteran in Bay City. He was found frozen to death in his home last month after Bay City Electric Light and Power, a municipal utility not subject to PSC rules, placed an electric limiter on his home. Tragedy struck again last week when two children died in a Fruitport Township

house fire caused by kerosene heaters that were being used to heat the home after the gas company shut off service.

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Senator Gilda Jacobs represents the 14th Senate District, which includes Farmington, Farmington Hills, Ferndale, Hazel Park, Huntington Woods, Lathrup Village, Oak Park, Pleasant Ridge, Royal Oak Township, Southfield and Southfield Township. She is the Minority Vice Chair of the Campaign & Election Oversight, Families & Human Services and Finance committees. She is a member of the Economic Development & Regulatory Reform and Health Policy committees. She can be reached toll-free in Lansing at 1-888-937-4453.