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Governor Cooper Extends Protections to North Carolinians Overdue on their Utility Bills as They Struggle with Economic Downturn from Pandemic

RALEIGH, N.C. – Today, at the [urging](#) of over 30 non-governmental organizations, Governor Cooper [announced the extension](#) of Executive Order 124, extending protections to North Carolinians who have had difficulty paying to keep their utilities on during the pandemic. These basic, yet essential services, provide life supporting water, sewer services, heat, and electricity. This order provides a lifeline for an additional 60 days.

The groups urging Governor Cooper to extend this order are non-profits focused on consumer protection, conservation, and environmental justice. Many of the over 3,000 North Carolinians who are behind in utility payments come from communities that are located near energy generation plants and are disproportionately affected by the pollution they create.

One of the signatories to the letter, Clean Air Carolina, advocates for public health and environmental justice through improved air quality. The group's Executive Director, June Blotnick, said of the Governor's action, "This is the right move, at the right time. The Governor's extension gives families struggling to make ends meet have one less thing to worry about." Blotnick continued, "As we emerge from this pandemic, the only way to ensure equitable and affordable access to energy is by accelerating the transition to cheaper, cleaner forms of energy."

Some have called this action a 'government handout'. In the letter to Cooper, groups point out, "While there have been claims that the moratorium is exacerbating that hardship by incentivizing "free ridership," such claims are unsubstantiated and discount the importance of ensuring access to vital services in order to protect public health." Blotnick said of this type of opinion, "Amidst this pandemic, we have to continue to look out for the health and wellbeing of our neighbors. Governor Cooper does that with this executive order."

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About Clean Air Carolina

Clean Air Carolina is a statewide nonprofit organization whose mission is to ensure cleaner air quality for all North Carolinians through education and advocacy and by working with our partners to reduce sources of pollution. www.cleanaircarolina.org