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COVID In Pennsylvania: Commonwealth To Lift Last Moratorium On Utility Shutoffs

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HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — Pennsylvania's Public Utility Commission on Thursday approved the lifting of its year-old moratorium preventing utilities from terminating service to all non-paying customers, adopted as Gov. Tom Wolf began ordering shutdowns to fight the spreading coronavirus.

The moratorium will lift April 1 for the state's lower-

income utility customers, but the commission also required all of its regulated utilities — including electric, natural gas, water, sewer and telephone — to give them additional payment plan options.

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Utilities asked as far back as last June at least to lift the moratorium, but Democrats on the five-member panel resisted until this month, as hundreds of millions of dollars in federal aid became available to renters that can be used to help pay utility bills.

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Utilities had been permitted to resume disconnections last fall for residential customers above 300% of the federal poverty level, or about \$79,000 in annual income for a family of four last year.

Reports from utilities on file with the commission showed a modest year-over-year increase in the number of customers who were behind on bills, as of December. Those same reports, however, showed a much bigger increase in the amount of money those customers owe.

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