



July 27, 2023

Honorable Maura Healey
Governor
State House
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Governor Healey:

Dignity Alliance Massachusetts respectfully urges your Administration to take steps to protect older adults, people with disabilities, and their caregivers from experiencing utility disconnections during period of extreme heat.¹ According to a recent article in *The Conversation*,² Massachusetts does not appear to be among the 19 states that prohibit utility shut-off during summer months. It is important to ensure that the utilities and the Department of Public Utilities will not allow utility shut-off during period of excessive heat for older adults and those with chronic conditions and that the public be made aware of actions they can take if a shut off occurs.³

Scientists have been predicting more dangerous heat waves for several years⁴ Under current Massachusetts law (C.164, s. 124F). Utilities are prohibited from terminating service during winter months, (November 15 – March 15) but apparently, not during periods of excessive heat. People with compromised health conditions, older adults and even those workers who provide home care services are at risk during heat waves. Loss of utilities during heat emergencies is a matter of energy justice for them and for low-income residents generally.⁵

In addition to protection against utility disconnection during heat waves, Dignity Alliance urges Massachusetts government to provide energy assistance funding for cooling in hot weather as well as heat in cold weather. We don't expect utilities to assume the total burden for this protection. It is a responsibility of the Commonwealth to ease this burden, especially during this time when the cost of everything seems to have increased. Furthermore, we hope that your Administration will encourage the medical community to provide validation of the need to utilities to those who require utilities to operate life and health-saving medical devices when requested.⁶ Research has shown that "the range of eligible chronic conditions is broad, including mental health conditions such as major depression, anxiety disorder, and ADHD, chronic

¹ [America faces a power disconnection crisis amid rising heat: In 31 states, utilities can shut off electricity for nonpayment in a heat wave \(theconversation.com\)](https://theconversation.com/america-faces-a-power-disconnection-crisis-amid-rising-heat-in-31-states-utilities-can-shut-off-electricity-for-nonpayment-in-a-heat-wave)

² [blob:https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/814f701a-3c7e-40ff-b67b-9af6e6cbcba4](https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/814f701a-3c7e-40ff-b67b-9af6e6cbcba4)

³ [Electric Utility Disconnections: Legal Protections & Policy Recommendations](#)

⁴ [Scientists Are Getting Better at Predicting Killer Heat Waves | WIRED](#)

⁵ [Introduction - Dorceta E. Taylor, 2022 \(sagepub.com\)](#)

⁶ [Universal Screening to Protect Patients from Energy Insecurity | HealthCity \(bmc.org\)](#)

diseases such as diabetes, asthma, and fibromyalgia, and serious illnesses such as pneumonia or the flu. While eligibility requirements are broad, the condition must be re-confirmed every six months, even for permanent conditions such as Down syndrome.”

Sincerely,

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Cc: Lt. Governor Kim Driscoll
Attorney General Andrea Campbell
Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs
Secretary of Health and Human Services Kate Walsh
Commissioner of Public Utilities
Director of Policy, Office of Governor, Sarah Sabshon

Dignity Alliance Massachusetts, a grass-roots coalition of aging and disability service and advocacy organizations and supporters, works to secure fundamental changes in the provision of long-term services, support, and care. A coalition of more than 30 organizations, committed to a new vision of dignity and care for older and disabled people in Massachusetts! Positions are not necessarily the opinions of all members.
