

# Attorney General Raoul Announces Passing Of Utilities Bill

March 27 2023 10:18 AM



SPRINGFIELD - Attorney General Kwame Raoul today announced the Illinois House of Representatives passed his legislation to protect vulnerable residents from gas or electric utility service disconnection for nonpayment of bills when temperatures are 90 F or above, or when the National Weather Service issues an excessive heat watch, heat advisory, or excessive heat warning.

Raoul initiated House Bill 1541, which was sponsored by Sen. Mattie Hunter and Rep. Eva-Dina Delgado, to amend the Public Utilities Act (PUA), which currently prohibits disconnection when the temperature is 95 F or hotter. However, the PUA does not account for extreme heat events when the heat index may rise to a dangerous level when temperatures are below 95 F.

“Summertime heat in Illinois is not the time to put lives at risk. Too often do Illinois residents die in heat waves that can easily be prevented by lowering the threshold for utility shutoffs,” Raoul said. “This updated legislation will protect the health and safety of Illinois’ most vulnerable citizens during extreme heat events through prohibiting electric and gas utilities from disconnecting service for nonpayment.”

Through education, advocacy, and research, Raoul's Public Utilities Bureau identified the statutory protections found in the PUA are insufficient to protect the most vulnerable Illinois citizens such as older adults, very young children, people with chronic conditions like high blood pressure, and people who are overweight.

"Access to electricity is a basic necessity, especially during times when temperatures soar. With climate change causing more frequent and intense heat waves, this legislation recognizes the urgent need to protect vulnerable individuals who rely on electricity for cooling and medical purposes," Delgado said. "For that reason, I was pleased to work with Attorney General Raoul to pass House Bill 1541 out of the House with an overwhelming majority."

"Utility interruptions during extreme heat are dangerous, especially for seniors, individuals with health conditions and young children. Without access to air conditioning or cooling measures, our neighbors are at an increased risk of dehydration, heat stroke and other heat-related illnesses," Hunter said. "Ensuring continuous access to gas and electricity services is not only a matter of comfort but of public health and safety."

Raoul reminded lawmakers that to accurately assess the danger of heat, both humidity and temperature must be considered. For example, a temperature of 92 F at 100% humidity can be dangerously hot while higher temperatures may be less dangerous when the humidity is low.

From May to September of 2022, there were only five days in Illinois when temperatures rose above 95 F. Over the course of this same time period, however, three elderly residents died from heat exhaustion on a day when the temperature was 92 F.

Energy and Policy Institute data shows Illinois had the most gas and electric service disconnections in the Nation for nonpayment in 2022. From Oct. 2021 to Oct. 2022, there was a 26% increase in gas and electric service disconnections for nonpayment with one utility realizing a 4,161% increase in gas service disconnections.