

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

October 21, 2020

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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### ***Having Trouble Paying Your Utility Bills due to COVID-Related Economic Hardship?***

**Montpelier, VT** – If you need help with paying off your utility bill, you may be eligible for a grant from the Vermont COVID-19 Arrearage Assistance Program (VCAAP). The program is available to Vermont residential utility customers and small businesses. “The pandemic has been ruthless in visiting economic hardship on so many Vermonters who have lost income and are struggling to keep up with their basic expenses,” said Department of Public Service Commissioner June Tierney. “Thankfully, Vermont has been able to make these grants available using federal CARES Act money to provide some relief,” Tierney continued, “but the time to apply is getting short and folks need to act soon.”

To date, more than five thousand applicants have received benefits under VCAAP. Still, Deputy Commissioner Riley Allen estimates that “the total amount of unpaid bills is much larger than what has been awarded to applicants so far.” About \$3 million of the \$8 million available has been awarded. The funding came from federal CARES Act, which has provided monies to states to help pay for COVID-19–related costs incurred as of March 1, 2020, and through December 30, 2020.

According to Allen, businesses and other non-residential ratepayers have been slow to apply. With only six weeks remaining, the Department encourages utility customers—especially small businesses—with past-due balances for wireline telephone, electric, natural gas, and certain private water companies, to apply to VCAAP if they have lost income or revenue due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This week, the VCAAP is being updated to supplement previous grants and to raise the existing cap per application. Beginning October 22, 2020, previous grant recipients will be eligible to automatically receive a funding supplement without need to file another application; the program cap will be extended to include additional balances that are over 60 days late and were incurred after March 1.

These program updates come in the wake of the order issued on October 14, 2020, by the Vermont Public Utility Commission lifting the moratorium on utility disconnections. “With the moratorium now lifted, I urge Vermonters facing disconnection to contact the Department to see if a VCAAP grant can help them out,” Commissioner Tierney said.

For more information about the VCAAP and to apply, please visit the Department’s Vermont COVID-19 Arrearage Assistance Program through the Department’s website at [publicservice.vermont.gov](http://publicservice.vermont.gov) ([publicservice.vermont.gov](http://publicservice.vermont.gov)), or contact the Department of Public

Service at [psd.consumer@vermont.gov](mailto:psd.consumer@vermont.gov); at 1-800-622-4496; or [online](https://capi.epsd.vermont.gov/?q=node/51) at <https://capi.epsd.vermont.gov/?q=node/51>.

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