

Environmental

Advocates

NY

EANY SUPPORTS Collecting Utility Affordability Data



Memo #11

[A.7554-B \(Cahill, et al.\)](#)

[S.5451-C \(Parker, et al.\)](#)

Explanation:

This bill requires the Public Service Commission to collect critical data from electric, gas, and water utilities and produce two reports on their findings. In addition, the Commission is required to host five public hearings across the state on the issue of utility affordability.

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how important water, electricity, heat, and other essential services are to keeping New Yorkers safe and healthy. However, almost two years into the pandemic, little is known about whether utility services are currently affordable for New Yorkers. The majority of utilities are not required to report how many shut-offs they conduct, how much debt has built up across the state, and how many New Yorkers are behind on their bills.

In Fall 2021, EANY and other organizations submitted FOIL requests to access this data from the 10 largest water utilities in the state. Only 4 of the 10 utilities [responded](#), and there was no standardized reporting among the 4 utilities that did respond. The Erie County Water Authority, for example, claimed that they do not track the number of shut-offs conducted.

The limited data available suggests that many New Yorkers are at risk of losing essential services now that New York's moratorium on utility shut offs and liens has expired. Approximately 1.4 million accounts in arrears [owed](#) nearly \$1.8 billion to energy utilities as of March 2020. This past December, the NYC Water Board [reported](#) that residential and commercial water arrears had nearly doubled since the start of the pandemic, totaling around \$750 million dollars.

Without a complete understanding of the scale and extent of the affordability crisis facing New Yorkers, lawmakers cannot effectively develop policies to help customers and utilities recover from the pandemic. While other states have taken action to collect and publish this data during the COVID-19 crisis, such as [North Carolina](#) and [Illinois](#), New York remains in the dark.

Summary:

This act amends the public service law, directing the Public Service Commission to prepare two written reports on the effect of the COVID-19 state of emergency on utilities. The bill also requires the Commission to host a public comment period for each report and hold five public hearings.