

Environmental

Advocates

NY

EANY SUPPORTS Collecting Utility Affordability Data



Memo #2

[S.1293 \(Parker, et al.\)](#)
[A.4573 \(Zebrowski, et al.\)](#)

Explanation:

This bill requires the Public Service Commission to collect critical data on the affordability of utility service from water, electric, and gas 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.

COVID-19 demonstrated how important water, electricity, heat, and other essential services are to keeping New Yorkers safe and healthy. However, three years into the pandemic, many New Yorkers are still struggling to pay their bills, especially as inflation and utility rates skyrocket. As of May 2022, 1.3 million households owed over \$1.9 billion in past-due energy bills, and New York City water and wastewater arrears [totalled](#) over \$770 million.

Shockingly, we do not know the full extent of New Yorkers who have lost or are at risk of losing access to utility services, especially water. Water utilities are not required to report how many shut-offs they conduct, how much debt has built up across the state, and how many people 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 claimed that they do not track the number of shut-offs conducted.

Now that New York's utility shut-off moratorium has expired, there is an especially urgent need to collect comprehensive affordability data. Water shut-offs have resumed in [Elmira](#) and [Jamestown](#), and likely in other cities as well. Without a complete understanding of the scale and extent of this problem, lawmakers cannot effectively develop policies to help customers and utilities recover.

In 2022, [New Jersey](#) enacted legislation nearly identical to this bill, and other states like [North Carolina](#) and [Illinois](#) have taken action to collect utility data during COVID-19. New York cannot remain in the dark any longer. We can't fix what we don't measure.

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 and hold public hearings.