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Karen L. Smith, MD, MPH
Director and State Public Health Officer
California Department of Public Health
P.O. Box 997377, MS 0500
Sacramento, CA 95899-7377

Re: SB 598 (Hueso): Public Utilities: Gas and Electric Service Disconnections (Support)

Dear Dr. Smith:

The California Conference of Local Health Officers (CCLHO) voted at the CCLHO Semiannual Conference Business Meeting on May 3, 2017 to take a Support recommendation on SB 598 (Hueso), a bill that would require the California Public Utilities Commission to develop policies, rules, or regulations to reduce gas and electric service disconnections for nonpayment by residential customers by 50 percent by 2021 and to adopt residential utility disconnections for nonpayment as a metric to be incorporated into commission proceedings.

SB 598 states that a gas or electrical corporations shall not disconnect service for nonpayment for those under hospice care at home, those dependent on life-support equipment, and those with a life-threatening condition or illness (certified in writing by a licensed physician or nurse practitioner).

CCLHO agrees with the goal of reducing service disconnections but recognizes that a 50% reduction may not be the optimal target and notes that the author of the bill has expressed a willingness to refine the goal of 50% as dialogue with stakeholders continue. Moreover, CCLHO believes that some added specificity on what constitutes a life-threatening condition or illness for the purpose of the bill would help create a more consistent application of those terms in physician or nurse practitioner certification of conditions/illnesses. With those caveats, CCLHO believes SB 598 can lead to reductions in the disconnection rate for those with severe health burdens (as above) trying to stay in their homes.

As you are aware, CCLHO was established in statute in 1947 to advise the California Department of Health Services (now the California Department of Public Health), other departments, boards, and commissions, as well as officials of federal, state and local agencies, the Legislature and other organizations on all matters affecting health. CCLHO membership consists of all legally appointed physician health officers in California's 61 city and county jurisdictions. This position of support is consistent with CCLHO's legislative priority of providing recommendations on population-based issues that affect the health of vulnerable populations.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at Ken.Cutler@co.nevada.ca.us or at 530-265-7154.

Sincerely and on behalf of the CCLHO membership,

Original signed by Dr. Ken Cutler

Ken Cutler, MD, MPH
President, California Conference of Local Health Officers

cc: Tim Sullivan, Executive Director, California Public Utilities Commission (PUC)