April 7, 2020

MECA
PO Box 1306
Great Falls MT 59403

Dear Members of the Montana Electric Cooperatives’ Association:

I want to write to thank you for your support and leadership in responding to the COVID-19 crisis in Montana and for your commitments to ensuring a reliable energy supply for your customers as part of my Stay At Home directive. I know Montana’s Electric Cooperatives have always worked hard to provide solutions to meet the challenges facing their customers and neighbors and have consistently prioritized the needs of their communities in times of uncertainty and crisis.

As you know, on March 31st, I announced a series of consumer protections to lessen the economic impacts on Montanans during the COVID-19 statewide emergency by stopping evictions, foreclosures and preventing the disconnection of utility services including water, heating and internet service. Under the directive, no business or political subdivision of the State supplying electricity, gas, sewage disposal, water, telephone, or internet services for use in a dwelling unit or residence may terminate that service. In addition, no fee or charge for late or untimely payment that becomes due during the time the directive is in effect may be billed or collected.

In order to dispel any confusion regarding implementation of this directive, I want to offer a few additional points of clarification. First and foremost, nothing in my directive absolves individuals or families from their obligations to pay their utility bills whether arising prior to or during this crisis. My office will continue to encourage those experiencing hardships to communicate directly with their providers to explore payment plans or other flexibilities to avoid the prospect of interruptions to their service in the future. Second, my directive applies only to residential customers—I recognize many businesses and commercial customers may also experience hardships during this time and my office stands ready to work with those businesses to identify state and federal relief that may be used to address revenue shortfalls. Third, the order is prospective as of the date of its issuance and would not affect any disconnect occurring prior to March 31.
Lastly, I want to encourage all Electric Cooperatives to track any lost revenues from partial or nonpayment attributed to customer impacts arising from the COVID-19 crisis. Careful accounting may be critical to accessing state and federal financial assistance in the future. My office stands ready to work with you to identify and communicate needs that the association may identify moving forward.

Thank you once again for your support of Montanans and for your leadership.

Sincerely,

STEVE BULLOCK
Governor