

Kentucky lawmakers renew push to establish statewide residential utility disconnection protections

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KENTUCKY LANTERN

Last month, on a frigid day in front of the state capitol building in Frankfort, advocates called on Democratic Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear to halt residential utility disconnections through the winter via executive order.

These groups, including the environmental advocacy nonprofit Kentucky Conservation Committee and Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, which supports policies and action for working-class families, cited the need for a moratorium because of an uncertain future for federal housing, food and heating assistance and rising costs faced by Kentuckians.

Beshear did not heed those calls, saying he didn't have the power to issue a moratorium. The governor is now calling for the creation of a \$75 million fund in the upcoming two-year state budget to help low-income Kentuckians with rising electricity costs.

Advocates gather in front of a sign that reads: "LEAVE THE HEAT ON!"

In December, advocates at the state capitol in Frankfort called on Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear to issue a moratorium on utility disconnections. (Provided)

Proponents see the moratorium as a temporary solution to a larger issue: the need for utility disconnection protections in state law during unsafe weather conditions regardless of how far behind customers fall on bills.

"The moratorium was a push for an immediate protection to be put in place while we wait for the legislature to put in those permanent protections," said Cara Cooper, the coordinator for Kentuckians for Energy Democracy, a campaign backed by the advocacy groups. "We've been working, along with a lot of other allies, for the past several years to try to put this disconnection protection bill through."

Forty-two states have policies surrounding utility disconnections in cold weather, and 19 states have policies in hot weather, according to a summary of policies on a federal data clearinghouse. Kentucky has neither.

Cooper said what kind of internal disconnection plans each utility has during extremely cold or extremely hot weather can depend on the utility, and some are not publicly accessible.

"We need everyone to have the same protections across the state, because no matter where you live or who your utility provider happens to be ... everyone deserves the same protections," Cooper said.

BILLS FILED THIS LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Bills in past years to create such standards in state law, primarily with support



KENTUCKY LANTERN PHOTO BY LIAM NIEMEYER

Rep. Susan Witten, R-Louisville, speaks at a press conference advocating on housing issues earlier this month.

from Democrats who are a superminority in the state legislature, have not received a committee hearing. But this year, Republican Rep. Susan Witten of Louisville is the primary sponsor of the bill to create utility disconnection standards.

Witten stands in front of microphones.

Witten, the co-chair of a task force that focused on housing issues last year, told the Lantern that House Bill 377 is about tackling the broader scope of issues connected to housing affordability.

"Housing is not just the building. It's everything that is required," Witten said. If Kentuckians are facing extreme heat or cold, she said, then she thought utility disconnections "would just be the right thing to do."

Witten said she would try to "champion" the bill, which is assigned to the House Natural Resources and Energy Committee, this session.

HB 377 would prevent gas and electric utilities from disconnecting residential service in situations including:

When the National Weather Service forecasts temperatures to be 32 degrees Fahrenheit or lower over a 72-hour timespan; disconnection would also be prohibited if temperatures are forecasted to be 95 degrees Fahrenheit or higher.

When a residential ratepayer has entered into a payment plan and paid at least 10% of their accrued utility bill or \$200, whatever amount is less.

When someone has received a "certificate of need" from a physician or a community or faith-based organization that shows a utility disconnection would "threaten the health and safety of the customer or the occupants of the customer's household."

The bill would only allow utilities to disconnect service between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Thursday; disconnections would be prohibited on Fridays, weekends and state and federal holidays.

The legislation would also specify how utilities would

give a final notice before a disconnection, along with requiring a utility to reconnect someone within 24 hours if they make a payment of at least 10% of an accrued bill and enter into a payment plan.

Rep. Lisa Willner, D-Louisville, who sponsored a similar bill last year and is co-sponsoring Witten's bill, said that cutting off utility service "could be the beginning of a cycle of being unhoused for people."

"I think representatives in general were more sensitive to concerns people [are] expressing about utility bills," Willner said. "I think frontline workers dealing with families in distress over utility cut-offs are seeing this as a very real problem."

THE RESPONSE FROM UTILITIES

Utilities in Kentucky generally say they already have internal policies in

place on when and how utility disconnections are conducted, with some concerned that having state requirements would restrict their flexibility to respond to case-by-case situations.

Joe Arnold, the spokesperson for Kentucky Electric Cooperatives, which represents 26 nonprofit electricity distribution cooperatives in the state, said in an emailed statement that the organization opposes legislation that "imposes a one-size-fits-all mandate and interferes with the long-standing relationship between cooperatives and their members."

"Electric cooperatives already have policies in place to address extreme weather, medical needs, and hardship situations, and members have existing avenues for assistance or intervention" through the state utility regulator Kentucky Public Service Commission and the attorney general, Arnold said.

Arnold also cautioned that "prescriptive disconnection policies" could limit flexibility for utilities to work out payment plans and shift costs to other ratepayers. Utilities have typically petitioned regulators to recover the costs of unpaid utility bills through the broader rate base.

Kentucky Power, an investor-owned electric utility serving 162,000 customers across 20 Eastern Kentucky counties, had adopted utility disconnection protections in 2024 as a part of a settlement agreement with interested groups before

Kentucky Public Service Commission.

Those standards include only disconnecting residential customers between 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 8 a.m. to noon on Friday. Kentucky Power also does not disconnect residential customers for 24 hours following temperatures that are forecast to be 32 degrees Fahrenheit or below or 95 degrees Fahrenheit or higher.

Sarah Lynch, a Kentucky Power spokesperson, said the utility's state-regulator approved tariffs already include "strong disconnection protections" and are "more permissive" than proposed legislation.

"Our philosophy is that disconnections are a last resort for our customers," Lynch said. "Customers who may be struggling to pay their bill are encouraged to contact us early so we can help identify available options."

Lynch said while the utility supports "reasonable customer protections," any policy needs to be flexible to address emergency situations. The language of HB 377 clarifies that the limitations put on utility disconnections doesn't apply in situations

"to protect the health and safety of the public."

A sign showing "LG&E, a PPL company" in downtown Louisville.

The sign outside one of the corporate offices for utility Louisville Gas and Electric and Kentucky Utilities. (Kentucky Lantern photo by Liam Niemeyer)

A spokesperson for Kentucky's largest electric utility in terms of customers served said it already has guidelines in place that suspend disconnections when "extreme temperatures" are forecast by the National Weather Service over a 24-hour period.

Drew Gardner, a spokesperson for Louisville Gas and Electric and Kentucky Utilities, which serves more than 1.3 million customers, said the guidelines are in place for times when "temperatures are forecasted to remain below freezing and we suspend service disconnections."

"It's important to keep in mind, though, that out of an abundance of caution, we'll still disconnect service when there are unsafe conditions," Gardner said, referring to situations such as a gas leak at a residence.

JOB ANNOUNCEMENT

The Pulaski County Conservation District is accepting resumes for a full time Soil Conservationist located in the Somerset office and working eight surrounding counties. Performs duties in both office and field settings while collaborating with landowners and conservation partners. Competitive pay with benefits. Preferred education is a bachelor's degree in agriculture or natural resources; agriculture experience may substitute for education.

A job description may be requested by emailing burnett7210@outlook.com.

Resumes can be hand delivered or mailed to: 45 Eagle Creek Drive; Somerset, KY 42503; until submittal deadline of 4:30pm on February 13th.

PUBLIC NOTICE

SECTION 00010 - ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDS

Sealed Bids for "North Richardson Street and Eckstein Street Sanitary Sewer Pump Station Replacements" for the City of Somerset, will be received until 2:00 p.m. (local time) on **February 18, 2026**, and then publicly opened and read aloud.

The primary scope of work includes the installation of approximately 662 LF of 4-inch PVC force main, 72 LF of 8-inch PVC gravity sewer, two (2) sanitary sewer manholes, two (2) duplex pump stations and valve vaults, and related appurtenances.

The Instructions to Bidders, Bid Form, Agreement Forms, Performance and Payment Bonds, Plans, Specifications and other Contract Documents may be viewed online at lynnimaging.com or examined at the following locations:

City of Somerset
306 East Mt. Vernon
Somerset, KY 42501
(606) 679-6366

Eclipse Engineers, PLLC
113 West Mt. Vernon Street
Somerset, KY 42501
(606) 451-0959

Copies of plans and specifications may be obtained from Lynn Imaging, 328 Old Vine Street, Lexington, Kentucky 40507 (859-255-1021) upon payment of a non-refundable price of \$250.00 for each set (including shipping and handling). No bid will be accepted unless the BIDDER is a *registered plan holder*. To become a *registered plan holder*, BIDDER must purchase at least one set of documents from Lynn Imaging and provide accurate name and contact information. Partial sets of documents will not be provided. Half-sized sets may be purchased for the full price. Digital download sets may be purchased for half of the full price. Questions shall be addressed to Alan R. Robinson, P.E. of Eclipse Engineers, PLLC, 113 West Mt. Vernon Street, Somerset, Kentucky 42501 (606-451-0959) as stated in the Specifications or by email to arobinson@eclipseengineers.net.

The OWNER reserves the right to waive any informality or to reject any or all bids.

Each BIDDER must deposit with his Bid, security in the amount, form and subject to the conditions provided in the Instructions to Bidders.

No BIDDER may withdraw his/her Bid within sixty (60) consecutive calendar days after the actual date of the opening thereof.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Liquor Emporium II, 300 Refinery Road, Somerset, KY 42501 hereby declares intention(s) to apply for a Transitional Quota Retail Package License no later than February 3, 2026. The business to be licensed will be located at 1690 N. Highway 27, Somerset, KY 42503 doing business as Liquor Emporium II.

Owner/President, Demetrios Haseotes of 300 Refinery Road, Somerset, Kentucky 42503

Any person, association, corporation, or body politic may protest the granting of the license(s) by writing the Dept. of Alcoholic Beverage Control 500 Mero St 2NE33, Frankfort, KY 40601, within 30 days (KRS 243.430) of the date of this legal publication.

Temporary Position for Pulaski County

FSA is looking for temporary office assistance to help deliver "The American Relief Act of 2025," which was signed into law on Dec. 21, 2024 and provided the U.S. Department of Agriculture with more than \$30 billion to deliver disaster recovery assistance for farmers and livestock producers. This position will help support the implementation of the Emergency Livestock Relief Program and the Supplemental Disaster Relief Program which will provide assistance to producers for necessary expenses due to losses due to weather related events in 2023 and 2024. Resumes can be submitted to the Pulaski County office at 45 Eagle Creek Drive, Ste 101, Somerset, KY 42503 or by email to Lindsey.New@usda.gov through the close of business on Friday, February 13, 2026.

All applicants shall:

1. Be citizens of the United States
2. Be a High School Graduate or have a GED.
3. Have a Social Security Number.
4. Be at least 18 years of age or 17 years of age for a high school graduate.
5. Have typing and/or keyboard experience.
6. Submit a Resume including your SSN, your country of Citizenship, education, and work experience.

EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY: Candidates will be considered without discrimination for any non-merit reason such as race, color, national origin, gender, religion or non-membership in any employee organization. This agency provides reasonable accommodations to applicants with disabilities. The decision on granting reasonable accommodation will be made on a case-by-case basis.