

March 10, 2023

Michigan State Representative Helena Scott
Chair, Energy, Communications, and Technology Committee
helenascott@house.mi.gov

cc: JoeyAndrews@house.mi.gov, Majority Vice Chair, PaulineWendzel@house.mi.gov, Minority Vice Chair,

Dear Representative Scott,

Thank you for calling the Energy, Communications, and Technology Committee meeting on March 15, 2023 to hear testimony from Michigan power companies regarding power outages. I am submitting the following background research on the *impact of power outages on health*.

We depend on electricity to manage healthcare more than ever, with challenges increasingly brought on by climate change.

1. Higher seasonal temperatures lead to heat stroke, cardiac arrest, COPD, early allergies, and increased mosquito- and tick-borne diseases.
2. Carbon monoxide poisoning increases in cold weather due to faulty use of generators, particularly during power outages lasting more than 24 hours.
3. Cardiovascular and respiratory diseases are exacerbated by both summer heat and winter cold, with home heating and air conditioning often beyond the control of patients.
4. Hospitals risk loss of access to electronic medical records, refrigeration, safely stored medications and vaccines, elevators and more due to power failures despite backup generators.
5. Emergency rooms are often crowded with people dependent on electric durable medical equipment (DME) looking for a working electrical outlet to recharge.
6. Aggravated kidney diseases, respiratory diseases, cardiovascular diseases, rheumatic diseases, diabetes, Alzheimer's disease, and dehydration are all health costs of Michigan's weakened electrical grid in weather extremes.

For anyone using durable medical equipment (DME) such as ventilators, oxygen generators, infusion pumps, dialysis machines, and electric wheelchairs for survival and mobility, reliable and resilient electricity is truly essential. Significantly, "the largest numbers of electricity-dependent individuals resided in California, Florida, Michigan, New York, and Texas." ([Molinari 2012](#)) In Molinari's national estimate, more than 99% of the DMEs under study are oxygen concentrators, the small canisters on a shoulder-strap that enable patients to participate in life again. These devices last about 3-4 hours before needing a recharge. Other DME are just as critical. When the lights go out, lives are at risk.

Systemic practices that negatively impact health in Michigan include shutoffs for late payment of electrical power. Detroit African-American households were twice as likely to be behind on utility payments than white households and three times more likely to be shut off for nonpayment ([Jessel 2019](#)). When choosing between paying for heat, cooling, or medical and dental care, what is the right answer? All are necessary, and neglecting any leads to additional health risk, hospitalization and cost.

A clean, reliable, and resilient electric grid supporting improved health statewide is essential for establishing a strong foundation for growing successful Michigan industries and jobs.

Thank you for focusing on this important matter.

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