



**State Senator Kent Smith**  
Democratic Whip  
21<sup>st</sup> District

Ohio Senate  
Senate Building  
Columbus, OH 43215  
614-466-4857

**Senate Finance Committee**  
**Senate Bill 246 Sponsor Testimony**  
**Prohibit terminating electric, gas service to certain households**  
**November 5, 2025**

Chairman Wilkin, Vice Chairman Reineke, Ranking Member DeMora, and members of the Public Utilities Committee.

Senate Bill 246 would broaden the current prohibitions on utility disconnections to additional vulnerable Ohio populations. This was not a policy focus of mine until I, and other members of the Northeast Ohio delegation, attended a January 2023 briefing hosted by University Hospitals at their Rainbow Babies Hospital where they shared a variety of significant pediatric research, one of which was about the impact of disconnections on children. Mr. Chairman, it is my hope that you will allow proponent testimony for SB 246 so that this Committee will be able to hear, for themselves, from those medical experts.

Currently, Ohio only has two utility disconnection prohibitions. They are for cold weather (November 1<sup>st</sup> – April 15<sup>th</sup>) and a medical condition. But the medical condition prevention is only available for 30 days at a time and can only be used three times in a calendar year.

This legislation would broaden those disconnection prohibitions to more vulnerable populations.

SB 246 would prohibit Ohio's utilities from disconnecting heat or electricity if the household has a child that is five or younger or a person who is 65 or older living there.

Senate Bill 246 would also protect people with a disability, an illness, or who are pregnant from being disconnected for non-payment if they provide proof of those conditions.

In addition, Utilities also could not disconnect customers who are at or below 200% of the federal poverty line for non-payment, assuming they provide proof of income.

Senate Bill 246 would set up a new payment program for those seeking disconnection protections. The legislation would allow customers would be enrolled in a payment program requiring them to make monthly payments of an amount that's less than either 7.5% of the customer's monthly income, or one-twelfth their combined gas and electric bills from the period immediately before they enrolled in the payment plan, whichever amount is lower. Senate Bill 246 would prohibit utilities from passing costs of those protections onto other ratepayers.

I would remind the Committee that utility rates are jumping making bills harder to pay across the state. The following is from a Consumer Energy Solutions article in August 2025, “Residential electricity customers are seeing their monthly bills rise by up to 44% based on their specific utility and usage levels, comparing spring rates to the new July rates.

Business customers could see their electricity rates increase by up to 29%, largely due to the direct impact of higher capacity charges.

Natural gas customers also face higher bills. For instance, Columbia Gas of Ohio’s Standard Choice Offer (SCO) rate has climbed by nearly 26% over the past seven months.”<sup>1</sup>

Data from 2022 indicate that 273,977 households across Ohio had their electricity disconnected and 156,792 had their natural gas disconnected.

AEP has by far disconnected the greatest number of Ohio families for non-payment, with over 146,075 in 2022 and FirstEnergy was second with 77,554 in 2022.

In terms of natural gas shut offs Center Point Energy disconnected 78,396 Ohio customers and Columbia Gas shut off 46,928.

I have attached a table that includes disconnection data and I will use the total electric and total natural gas disconnections to make a point on the economic impact of disconnections to investor owned utilities concerning these disconnections.

Utility Parent Company	2022 Shutoffs	Average Monthly Bill in Ohio	Cost to Prevent Disconnections	2022 Shareholder Dividends	% of Shareholder Dividends to Prevent Disconnections
AES Corp (full year)	23,077	\$132.03	\$3,046,856.31	421,000,000	0.724
First Energy Corp	77,555	\$132.03	\$10,239,586.65	891,000,000	1.149
CenterPoint Energy	13,731	\$132.03	\$1,812,903.93	489,000,000	0.371
Duke Energy	13,539	\$132.03	\$1,787,554.17	3,188,000,000	0.056
American Electric Power	146,075	\$132.03	\$19,286,282.25	1,645,200,000	1.17
Total	273,977	\$132.03	\$36,173,183.31	6,634,200,000	0.55

Utility Parent Company	2022 Shutoffs	Average Monthly Bill in Ohio	Cost to Prevent Disconnections	2022 Shareholder Dividends	% of Shareholder Dividends to Prevent Disconnections
Columbia Gas	46,928	\$148.00	\$6,945,344.00	749,000,000	0.927
Dominion East Ohio	31,070	\$148.00	\$4,598,360.00	3,500,000,000	0.131
CenterPoint Energy	78,396	\$148.00	\$11,602,608.00	1,000,000,000	1.160
Duke Energy	398	\$148.00	\$58,904.00	2,400,000,000	0.002
Total	156,792	\$148.00	\$23,205,216.00	7,649,000,000	0.30

Let’s walk through electric disconnections first.

There were 273,000 electric disconnections across the state in 2022. The average monthly bill was \$132.03 so the cost to prevent those disconnections was \$36,173,000. However, the 5 investor-owned utilities paid over \$6,634,000,000 to shareholders in the form of quarterly

<sup>1</sup> <https://consumerenergysolutions.com/ohio-energy-costs-continue-to-rise-through-summer-2025/>

dividends. Which Means ... the cost to prevent all electric disconnections across Ohio, when compared to shareholder dividends was just over one half of one percent.

Now let's do the same thing for the natural gas shut offs. There were 156,000 natural gas disconnections across the state in 2022. The average monthly bill was \$148.00 so the cost to prevent those disconnections was \$23,205,000. However, the 4 investor-owned utilities paid over \$7,649,000,000 to shareholders in the form of quarterly dividends. Which Means ... the cost to prevent all the Ohio gas disconnections, when compared to shareholder dividends was less than one third of one percent.

### Other States Provide More Protection

As I mentioned, Ohio offers cold weather protection – which is also offered in 41 other states. And Ohio offers a medical condition protection – which is available in 45 other states. Beyond those two buckeye state protections, hot weather protection is available in 23 states.<sup>2</sup> Seniors have protections in 15 states. There are seven states that offer protections if infants and children are in the household. If you have a medical disability, 10 states will grant you a utility disconnection protection.

SB 246 would require utilities to add zip code data to their current annual reporting of disconnection data to the PUCO, and to increase the frequency of the reports from quarterly to monthly. The PUCO rejected consumer advocacy groups' requests for zip code data in 2021 which I believe is a mistake that SB 246 will attempt to correct.

Mr. Chairman and member of the Committee, I think you can agree that Ohio can offer more utility disconnection protections to many more vulnerable Ohioans and not jeopardize the bottom line of the utility companies that have been granted monopoly service areas within our state.

I would welcome any questions at this time.

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://san.com/cc/as-electric-bills-rise-more-states-ban-disconnections-in-dangerous-weather/>