

SENATE ECONOMIC GROWTH COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO ASSEMBLY, No. 4671

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: JANUARY 14, 2021

The Senate Economic Growth Committee reports favorably and with committee amendments Assembly Bill No. 4671.

As amended and reported, this bill requires a public utility and local utility to notify, in a form and manner determined by the public utility and local utility, respectively, each of its residential customers of information and resources available to residential customers concerning utility service and bill payment assistance during the coronavirus 2019 pandemic. The notices required by the bill would have to contain information on any: 1) moratorium in effect on the disconnection, discontinuance, or termination of utility service; 2) deferred bill payment agreement program; 3) bill payment assistance program; 4) arrearage forgiveness program; and 5) moratorium in effect on rate increases or on the imposition of late fees, interest, or liens for late payments. The notices are to be provided in the same manner and frequency that regular bills are provided, until 18 months after the date of the termination of Executive Order No. 103 of 2020, which authorized the State of Emergency in response to the coronavirus 2019 pandemic. This information also is to be published prominently on the public utility and local utility websites.

The bill's provisions are not to be construed as permitting a local utility from establishing or administering a bill payment assistance program that is not permitted by law.

The committee amended the bill to include information about any moratorium in effect on rate increases or on the imposition of late fees, interest, or liens for late payments in the required notice, to change the notification frequency from quarterly to match regular billing frequency, to require the notice to be provided in the same manner as regular bills, and to also require the information to be provided on public utility and local utility websites. Finally, the amendments remove a provision requiring the Department of Community Affairs and Board of Public Utilities to compile a list of State and federal bill payment assistance programs and for the public utilities and local utilities to distribute that information to their customers in the notifications required under this bill. A replacement provision provides that nothing in the bill is to be

construed as permitting a local utility from establishing or administering a bill payment assistance program that is not permitted by law.

As amended and reported, Assembly Bill No. 4671 is identical to Senate Bill No. 3326, which was also reported and amended by the committee on this date.