

CONSUMER SPOTLIGHT

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE & CONSUMER AFFAIRS
DIVISION OF CONSUMER ADVOCACY



Executive Director's Message



By: Dean Nishina

While the effects of the global pandemic have led to uncertainty and ever-changing challenges for most of 2020, the Division of Consumer Advocacy continues to protect and represent consumer interests.

Our office has worked tirelessly to ensure the consumers' voices are heard during these unprecedented times. Read about the conditions surrounding Young Brothers' emergency rate increase in this edition.

Also featured in this newsletter is the current suspension on the termination and disconnections of services due to non-payment.

Lastly, we identify possible resource assistance options for Hawaii consumers who are experiencing hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As we navigate this crisis together, you can be sure that DCA is doing our part to represent the best interests of consumers.



Are 'energy vampires' attacking your home?

These so-called 'energy vampires' are electronics and appliances that continue to draw power, even when turned off or idle. Devices like hair dryers, curling irons, computers, printers, and microwaves drain power even when shut off. Unplugging or using a power strip to switch off devices ensures your home won't be plagued by these energy suckers.

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Teaching Kids to Be Energy Conscious



You can cut your family expenses by getting everyone involved in saving energy. Games and challenges can make saving energy family fun!

Here are some ways to make it happen:

- **Make turn-off and savings targets a challenge.** List ways to save energy and challenge kids to achieve these goals. Include things like closing doors, turning off the lights and taking shorter showers.
- **Try going electricity-free for several hours.** You can plan the time around family activities, like a candlelit board game evening.
- **Incorporate games.** Go on a transportation adventure - if you usually travel by car, plan an outing around a bike ride or walk to illustrate how this helps save energy.
- **Plant a garden.** Create a rainwater barrel and use it to water the plants.
- **Create a self-reporting system.** Use stickers to recognize good energy-saving habits. This also encourages your kids to be more aware of their energy usage throughout the day.



GEORGE F. LEE / GLEE@STARADVERTISER.COM

PUC Approves Young Brothers' Temporary Rate Relief Request

The Public Utilities Commission (PUC) approved Young Brothers' (YB) emergency rate increase with conditions to restore sailings, improve customer service and undergo an independent audit. The PUC found that temporary rate relief is necessary to ensure the continuation of YB services, and thus approved a revenue increase of \$26,997,928 or an approximate 46% rate increase.

The approval included several conditions:

- Instituting a 12-month "stay-out" period for additional general rate increases.
- Requiring YB to provide 6-months advance notice if they decide to discontinue regulated interisland service in the future.
- Requiring YB to develop and implement a comprehensive customer service plan.
- Requiring YB to undergo a financial and management audit by an independent party.

As a result of the decision, YB resumed the full "pre-COVID" sailing schedule and implemented the 46% increase on September 1, 2020. If customers would like to share how the temporary rate increase is affecting their business or life, DCA encourages customers to file public comments.

Docket No. 2019-0117

PUC Docket Numbers are included in these articles for further, in depth reading. PUC public filings are accessible online via the PUC's Document Management System (DMS). Visit: <http://dms.puc.hawaii.gov/dms>

SUSPENSION OF TERMINATION/DISCONNECTION OF REGULATED UTILITY SERVICES



Back in April 2020, the Division of Consumer Advocacy (DCA) filed a request that the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) temporarily suspend the termination or disconnection of services due to non-payment. DCA also requested that the Commission not allow utilities to assess charges or fees, including the accrual of interest on outstanding balances.

In response, based on the extraordinary circumstances related to COVID-19, the PUC ordered all PUC-regulated electric, gas, telecommunications, water, and wastewater public utilities in the State of Hawaii to temporarily suspend disconnections of services. The PUC extended the suspension of service disconnections several times, and it is currently set to expire December 31, 2020.

Customers should continue paying their bills to the extent possible during this time, as they will still ultimately be responsible for paying utility service billings accrued during this suspension. The Consumer Advocate also recommended that utilities be encouraged to offer payment plans or other reasonable arrangements to allow customers more time to pay balances, and the PUC also adopted that recommendation. The Consumer Advocate continues to look for ways to help consumers with bill payment options and avoid disconnection.

Non-Docketed, Order No. 37284

Resources for Residents

Below are community programs that can offer support to residents in this unprecedented time.

Aloha United Way: Call 211 for referrals to a broad range of programs, including assistance with basic needs like utility payments.

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program

(LIHEAP): LIHEAP provides assistance to Hawai'i households by assisting with a one-time payment towards their utility bills.

Hale Kākou – Cares Act Assistance Program:

providing rent, mortgage, and utility assistance for those individuals and households impacted by COVID-19.

CARES Act funding: may still available to those in need.

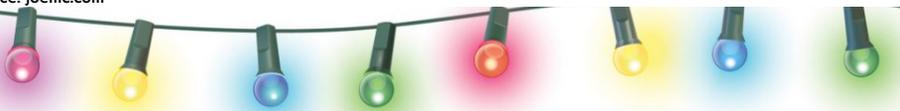
*Contact your local utility for payment arrangement options that might be available.

Upcoming Dates of Interest



- **Dec 14, 2020: World Energy Conservation Day**
Celebrated globally to highlight the importance of energy consumption and its use in our day-to-day life, its scarcity and its impact on sustainability of global eco systems.
- **Dec 25, 2020: Christmas** (State holiday, our office will be closed).
- **Jan 1, 2021: New Year's Day** (State holiday, our office will be closed).
- **Jan 18, 2021: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day** (State holiday, our office will be closed).

Source: joemc.com



MERRY, BRIGHT AND EFFICIENT HOLIDAY LIGHTING

Decking the halls doesn't have to take a toll on your energy bill! Keep your holiday lighting merry, bright and energy efficient with LED light strands.



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We also welcome feedback and story ideas. Email us at dca@dcca.hawaii.gov.

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