



MISSOURI SENATE

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Sen. Coleman Introduces Hot-Weather Legislation to Energy Committee

JEFFERSON CITY— Sen. Maida Coleman, D-St. Louis City, on Thursday presented legislation to the Senate Commerce, Energy and the Environment Committee that would provide utility assistance to Missourians during heat waves. Senate Bill 11 creates a “hot-weather rule” prohibiting utility companies from disconnecting power to eligible households during extreme heat.

“The excessive heat and humidity that Missourians experience during the summer months is not just uncomfortable — it is life-threatening,” Coleman said. “Many Missourians cannot afford to keep their homes cool during severe conditions, and this legislation ensures that we will not turn our backs on them.”

Under SB 11, natural gas and electrical utilities cannot cut off service to certain households from June 1 to September 30 when the temperature is expected to top 88 degrees. Missouri currently has a law that prohibits utilities from turning off heating power during freezing temperatures. Homes that qualify for the “cold-weather rule” are eligible under SB 11.

At the energy committee hearing, Coleman noted that press accounts put the number of heat-related deaths in the St. Louis area last summer at anywhere from 12 to 14. By August 8, 2006, there were six heat-related deaths in Kansas City. Many of these were elderly Missourians found dead in their homes.

“These folks — all Missouri citizens — are the parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters of residents of this state,” Coleman said. “It is unacceptable that in modern times we still have senseless deaths such as these.”

Coleman also cited a report stating that Missouri had the third-highest number of heat-related deaths in the nation last year. Only the desert states of Arizona and Nevada had more.

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Missouri has received national attention for being a leader in enacting the cold-weather rule, which prevents utilities from cutting off power when the temperature is forecast to drop below 32 degrees between Nov. 1 and March 31. That law has been in effect since 1977.

Texas already has a law in place prohibiting electricity from being cut off during heat advisory warnings. The AARP is backing SB 11, and Coleman said she expects bi-partisan support for the legislation.

“To elderly and needy people, to hard-working families that have trouble making ends meet through the summer, this legislation provides a small step forward to ensure that our most vulnerable citizens are not the victims of preventable heat-related deaths,” Coleman said. “I look forward to continuing work with my Senate colleagues to see this measure through the legislative process.”

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