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TEXAS DISASTER PREPAREDNESS
DURABLE MEDICAL EQUIPMENT POWER TASK FORCE

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February's Winter Storm Uri blackout profoundly affected many Texans with disabilities who rely on powered durable medical equipment (DME) for their survival and wellness. In response to this disaster the Texas State Independent Living Council and Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities gathered disability stakeholders to form a cross-disability Durable Medical Equipment Power Task Force to identify solutions for meeting emergency power needs for individual users of DME living in the community. The task force is comprised of AARP Texas, The Arc of DFW Area, Disability Rights Texas, Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities, Texas Legal Services Center, Texas Medical Equipment Providers (TexMEP), Texas Parent to Parent, stakeholders in healthcare and emergency response, disability advocates, and other agencies serving Texans with disabilities.

Many Texans who depend on DME lack the physical and financial resources required to provide their own back-up power. Based on our own experiences and information gathered, the task force established a list of inclusive emergency planning recommendations for consideration and implementation by the Public Utility Commission (PUC) of Texas.

To protect the lives of Texans dependent on DME, the PUC must utilize its leadership role to coordinate electric utility disaster response plans with the Texas Department of Emergency Management (TDEM) and advocacy organizations. Inclusive planning and operations are needed to ensure critical lifelines are sustained for DME-dependent consumers in the event of an unplanned outage. In the planning process, electric utilities, in coordination with TDEM and local offices of emergency management, should implement the following:

- Establish a process to utilize contact information for critical care and chronic condition residential customers to conduct wellness checks during extended outages.
- Establish a dedicated toll-free telephone number available 24/7 for critical care and chronic condition residential customers to call for information about unplanned outages.

- Provide back-up batteries and battery charging options for DME for critical care and chronic condition residential customers.
- Provide emergency portable generators to critical care and chronic condition residential customers.
- Fund a back-up power grant program for households that meet appropriate income guidelines and eligibility criteria. See the PG&E Disability Disaster Access and Resources program as an example.
- Coordinate with local offices of emergency management to identify emergency power reserves for local dialysis clinics.
- Protect individuals with temperature-sensitive conditions during unplanned power outages.
- Provide medically necessary refrigeration during unplanned outages.
- Develop other applicable measures for building a safety net for critical care and chronic condition residential customers.

Respectfully submitted,

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