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I've held the hands of grandmothers shivering in their homes because the heat was cut off mid-winter. I've sat across from parents in tears, wondering how to keep their babies cool during a blistering summer when the air conditioner stopped — not because it broke, but because the power was shut off. These aren't rare moments. In Eastern Kentucky, they are heartbreakingly common.

As a professional in this region, I see the brutal cost of poverty every single day. Families here are proud and resilient. They aren't out here asking for hand outs, they aren't asking for debt forgiveness, to be honest most of them ask for nothing. But they are also struggling — with job loss, illness, addiction, and the legacy of a changing economy. When an electric bill doubles overnight — and we've seen this with Kentucky Power — families are left with impossible choices: pay for food or pay for power? Buy medicine or keep the lights on?

In the middle of these impossible decisions, disconnection notices arrive like a death sentence.

Electricity in Eastern Kentucky isn't a luxury. It's a lifeline. It runs the oxygen machines that keep our neighbors breathing. It powers the heaters that keep newborns warm and the fans that prevent heatstroke in the elderly. Without it, the most basic safety and dignity disappear.

I've had to call emergency shelters in the dead of winter for mothers and infants who were left in the cold with no power and nowhere to go. I've seen children do homework by flashlight while their parents scramble to find help. I've seen too many people fall through the cracks because help came too late.

Legislation that protects Kentuckians from utility shutoffs during extreme weather isn't about politics. It's about people. It's about drawing a line and saying: no one should freeze to death in their home because they couldn't pay a bill. No child should suffer heat exhaustion because their family is poor.

We need laws in Kentucky that prohibit electric disconnections during periods of dangerous heat and cold. Period. These protections would give families time — time to seek help, make a payment plan, or connect with local agencies like mine. They would save lives.

I urge our lawmakers: listen to the voices of Eastern Kentucky. Hear the fear in a mother's voice when she tells her child to sleep in their coat. Hear the pain in an elderly man's voice when he says he's trying to survive the cold "just one more night."

No one in our community should suffer or die because they can't afford to keep the power on.
Protecting them is not just policy — it is moral responsibility.