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## **Public Interest Advocates Issue Open Letter to Governor on Utility Commission Vacancy**

***“Find a conscientious leader who will look out for the poor and the most impacted”***

INDIANAPOLIS -- Feb. 5, 2018 -- Citizens Action Coalition, Hoosier Environmental Council, Indiana State Conference of NAACP, Hoosier Interfaith Power & Light and the Sierra Club Hoosier Chapter today released the following:

### **An Open Letter to Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb:**

In a few days, you will be sent three names from which to choose the next commissioner of the Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission, and you will have to select a new chairman to replace Jim Atterholt, who recently retired. Hoosiers’ pocketbooks are affected by the Commission perhaps more than any other state agency, so your decision is vitally important.

For most Hoosiers, the Commission decides how much we pay each month for electricity, gas, water and sewers -- services we cannot live without. These services are, for most of us, provided by monopoly utilities, and the Commission is supposed to protect consumers because -- by design -- there’s no competition for these essential human services in the marketplace.

The Commission decides how much we pay in utility bills and whether a utility may build or update a power plant or invest in solar or energy efficiency.

In its Just Energy Policies Campaign, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) found that low-income communities, the elderly, and African Americans pay a disproportionate amount of their incomes on energy. Low-income communities are “more likely to have water shut-offs and electricity shut-offs, thereby depriving them of essential services” and too often resulting in dangerous situations. Nationally, an estimated 68% of African Americans live within 30 miles of a coal-fired power plant.

Also, women are more likely to have low incomes and are vulnerable to toxins from coal-fired power plants that affect their reproductive systems. Indiana’s high infant mortality rate is no coincidence, when you consider pollution from super polluter power plants.

According to the NAACP, most public utility commissioners in the United States are white, male, and mid- to high-wealth individuals. Two white men and two white women now sit on the Indiana Commission, with one vacancy. The candidates you are choosing from will add no racial inclusion; six of the seven are white males and one is a white female. The nominating committee, appointed by you and state legislative leaders, contains only white men.

Who will speak for Indiana's most impacted populations when evidence comes before the Commission? Who will understand the difficulty many Hoosiers face due to declining incomes and rising costs? Who will have the courage to reject frequent, costly utility requests to keep operating aging power plants that are no longer needed, or that are too expensive to operate and maintain?

Last year, hundreds of residents in South Bend, Fort Wayne and Muncie turned out at Commission hearings to oppose a 19.7 percent rate increase proposed by Indiana Michigan Power. They told poignant, gut-wrenching stories of living in the cold and dark, or choosing between food, medicine and electric bills. In 2018, Indianapolis Power & Light is seeking a 28 percent increase that would bring the average home's monthly base bill to \$125 -- before taxes and other charges.

Governor Holcomb, in your recent State of the State address you said your focus in 2018 was going to be on "people, people, people" and your single purpose was "to make life better for all Hoosiers." Therefore, we ask you to have the courage to break with what continues to be "business as usual." We urge you to put a pin in this selection process. Seize this moment to examine ways in which the candidates for this important administrative body are champions of low-income Hoosiers, and other groups who bear a disproportionate financial and health impact from IURC decisions.--

We urge you to consider the many Hoosiers who cannot pay their utility bills, who are affected by power plant pollution, and who lack access to clean energy and clean water. We urge you to find a conscientious leader who will look out for the poor and the most impacted more than the interests of financially healthy monopoly utilities.

We will be watching.

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Hoosier Interfaith Power & Light