

December 30, 2019

ATTORNEY GENERAL RAOUL HIGHLIGHTS NEW LAWS

Chicago — Attorney General Kwame Raoul today highlighted two new laws initiated by his office that will go into effect Jan. 1.

“Both new laws offer additional protections for people throughout Illinois and provide my office with better tools to fight against unfair and unlawful practices that harm the financial security and wellbeing of consumers and workers across the state,” Raoul said.

Senate Bill 651, the Home Energy Affordability and Transparency (HEAT) Act, will protect consumers from high-priced alternative retail electric and gas suppliers that claim to offer cheaper energy rates than traditional utility companies but come at a high cost to consumers. The HEAT Act will give the Attorney General’s office even stronger tools to hold accountable suppliers who engage in fraudulent and misleading conduct and return money to consumers who have been defrauded.

Sponsored by Senate Majority Leader Kimberly Lightford and House Assistant Majority Leader Jehan Gordon-Booth, the HEAT Act requires suppliers to disclose critical pricing information to consumers, prohibits suppliers from charging customers termination fees and penalties, restricts suppliers from automatically renewing customers’ contracts without their express agreement, prohibits suppliers from enrolling customers who receive financial assistance to pay their utility bills, and gives the Attorney General’s office improved tools to return money to consumers who have been defrauded and shut down suppliers that engage in fraudulent and misleading conduct.

The HEAT Act is part of Attorney General Raoul’s efforts to protect public utilities customers from increasing rates and strengthen oversight of alternative retail energy suppliers. Raoul offered the following advice for Illinois residents who are solicited by an ARES:

- NEVER answer the door to a stranger, especially if they are trying to get you to switch your utility service.
- NEVER show or share your utility bill or account number with someone who comes to your door or calls you on the phone.
- Do not sign anything.
- Be wary of any offer that promises or guarantees savings.
- Be aware that if an ARES offers a price that seems lower than your utility, it could be an introductory rate that increases later.
- Do not forget about hidden fees.
- No alternative supplier is affiliated with or endorsed by your utility or the government. If you sign up for service with an alternative supplier, you are entering a new contract with a different company.

Senate Bill 161, sponsored by Sen. John Curran and Rep. Jay Hoffman, will formally establish the Worker Protection Unit within the office of the Attorney General, which will have the authority to enforce existing laws that protect workers’ rights and law-abiding businesses in Illinois. This new law will help prevent and remedy wage theft and unfair labor practices.

Attorney General Raoul has long fought against unlawful employment practices like paying workers less than the legal minimum wage, taking illegal deductions from workers’ paychecks and misclassifying employees to

avoid wage and labor laws that protect workers. SB 161 will curb these abuses, recover payments for workers, and prevent the public costs of unlawful employment practices by:

- Codifying a dedicated unit within the Attorney General's office to enforce violations of worker protection laws;
- Providing clear legal authority for the Attorney General to investigate and bring enforcement actions against employers that commit wage theft and other workplace rights violations, such as violations of the Minimum Wage Law, the Wage Payment and Collection Act, and the Employee Classification Act; and
- Creating a Worker Protection Task Force to facilitate information sharing and collaboration between local prosecutors, the Attorney General's office, the Illinois Department of Labor, the Illinois Department of Human Rights, the Illinois Department of Employment Security and the Workers' Compensation Commission.

The new law grants the Attorney General the authority to appoint to the task force three elected State's Attorneys and Assistant Attorneys General within his office. Attorney General Raoul appointed Cook County State's Attorney Kimberly Foxx, DuPage County State's Attorney Robert Berlin, and St. Clair County State's Attorney James Gomric. Raoul also appointed Alvar Ayala – Bureau Chief of the Attorney General's Workplace Rights Bureau – and John Greenwood, Bureau Chief of the Attorney General's Special Prosecutions Bureau to serve as members of the task force.