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A Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission member on Monday encouraged the state's utilities to "recognize and attend to" families who may be adversely affected by new federal immigration policies, venturing into a sensitive political area he said had caused some "angst" for other members of the PUC.

Andrew G. Place, the commission's vice chairman, sent a letter to the state's public utilities Monday to raise awareness about potential problems among immigrant customers and "to provide assistance, whenever possible, to minimize the risks to essential utility services."

Place, a British immigrant who grew up in the United States, was appointed to the PUC in 2015 by Gov. Wolf. He said his message was intended primarily to alert utilities, as well as the PUC's Bureau of Consumer Services, that immigrant families may be undergoing stress from new federal policies that could affect their ability to pay their utility bills.

He said he asked the PUC last week to make a statement during its public meeting urging utilities to be aware that the federal government's proposed travel ban might impact immigrant families, which may not be immediately clear because of language issues or cultural barriers or fear. "I argue that we have a shared responsibility to ensure that members of our communities are able to remain in their homes and maintain utility services during this time that they are unable, by this unforeseeable change in circumstance, to lawfully re-enter or reside in the United States or during the time that their families must manage without them," [Place said in his statement](#).

But he said there was "near unanimous" agreement among the four other commission members that "speaking it from the bench could be seen as a political statement rather than strictly a regulatory matter."

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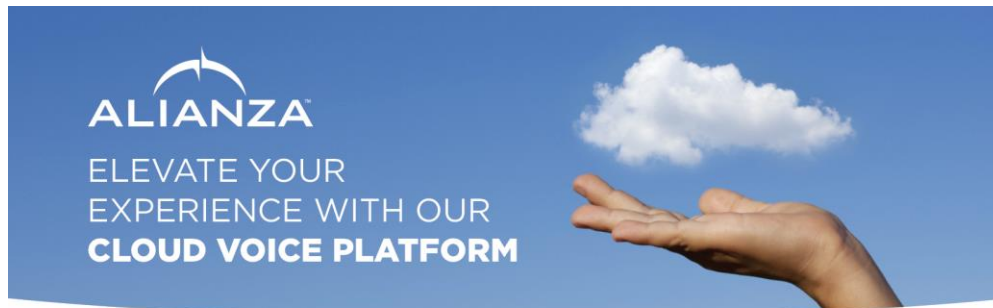
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There is no evidence any families have lost utility service since the Trump administration's proposed travel ban on immigrants from seven predominantly Muslim countries was announced, Place said. If such families ran into financial difficulties, he noted, they might not be aware that utilities have programs to provide relief for customers in emergencies, including assistance for low-income customers. "If there is an issue, it may only be dozens of families," he said. "It's going to be dispersed,



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isolated. It's going to creep up over time. It may be months before people start addressing issues like their utility bills."

The commission is collegial by tradition and bipartisan by law — no party can hold more than three of the five seats. Place, who is among the Democratic majority, said he withdrew the issue as a topic

to be considered by the entire board because it "was causing a huge amount of angst." He emphasized that his message to the state's public utilities reflected the voice of a single commissioner, not the entire commission.

"This is a difficult one because it's a highly charged situation, but I hope that my statement was nuanced and did not focus on the political, and really narrowed it down on the specific issue," Place said. "It's no different than if there was a storm, or people deployed to a conflict, anything that has unusual impacts." — *philly.com*

It's not TV: It's Amazon Prime?

Armed with a growing number of award-winning movies and TV shows, Amazon is weighing a charge into the premium TV and movie channel business, The Post has learned. The Jeff Bezos-helmed e-commerce giant is in the early stages of discussions about developing a new paid channel carrying high-end dramas and movies of its own, two sources familiar with those discussions said.

The plan is to carve out a separate streaming home for first-run shows that it helped to fund, the sources said. The plan, which is not guaranteed to come to pass, is being driven by Amazon's recent success at the Golden Globes and the huge number of Oscar nods for its movies, sources added.

The \$396 billion company, which recently made moves to become a global shipper, has its own Amazon Studios, run by Roy Price. It received six Academy Award nominations, including "Manchester by the Sea" for Best Picture. That nomination is a first for a streaming service. Amazon's other contender is Iranian-made "The Salesman," a foreign-language contender. "Manchester" stars Casey Affleck and Michelle Williams. It cost \$10 million to acquire at the Sundance Film Festival.

Last year, Price lured Woody Allen's "Cafe Society" to Amazon with a collaborative deal. It landed on Amazon's service soon after its theatrical debut. Amazon has first-hand knowledge of premium channels. It began offering digital versions of HBO, Showtime and Starz as part of Amazon Channels. Separately, Epix is also an aggressive player. By all accounts, Amazon is driving significant business for the premium players.

Separately, Amazon has a wide-ranging choice of movies and TV shows to stream as part of its Amazon Watch Instant service. Among the top shows are "Man in the High Castle," and Billy Bob Thorton's "Goliath" and "The Night Manager," starring Tom Hiddleston and Hugh Laurie. "In a few

years, you'll see an Amazon channel like HBO," one in-the-know Amazon employee told The Post. "We're looking at being a global news and media company. There are key people working on it." To be sure, creating a highly profitable service like HBO doesn't come easily.

Time Warner said on an earnings call last week that its HBO unit saw revenue grow 5 percent, to \$5.89 billion, in 2016, with adjusted operating income up 2 percent, to \$1.9 billion. Time Warner also said that HBO over-the-top subscribers had tripled since 2015 and were now 2.4 million. CBS' Showtime and Liberty's Starz are also adding millions of subscribers.

For Amazon, however, the game is not simply about winning awards. The bigger prize is getting customers to spend more time at the site so they will click around and start shopping. Bezos famously said the company was first to use a Golden Globe to get people to buy toilet paper. "When people join Prime, they buy more of everything we sell," he told The Hollywood Reporter. "They buy more shoes, they buy power tools and so on." How you pay for great content is an important part of making great content available," he said. An Amazon spokesperson did not respond to two requests for comment. – *New York Post*



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