

Maryland Office of People's Counsel (OPC) IMPORTANT ALERT

Moratorium on Utility Shut-Offs, Bill Assistance And Deferred Payment Plans

Protect yourself. Contact your utility NOW for a payment plan.

You may be eligible for energy assistance – APPLY NOW.

Questions? Contact OPC at 410-767-8150 or DLInfo_OPC@maryland.gov.

Moratorium Status

1. The Public Service Commission (PSC) has issued a moratorium on shut-offs of gas, electricity, telephone (landline only), and private water companies.
 - a. Customers cannot be turned off prior to November 15, 2020.
 - b. Utilities can begin to send turn-off notices on October 1, 2020. This gives you 45 days to address past-due utility bills.
 - c. Any shut-off notice sent prior to October 1, 2020 is void.
2. The Governor's Executive Order prohibiting shut-offs of utility services and other residential services has expired.
 - a. The PSC order is the only order prohibiting shut-offs of residential utility services.
 - b. There is no moratorium on shut-offs of cellphone, VOIP, broadband, or internet services.

Past-Due Bills – Steps to Take

1. **Apply for energy assistance now.** If you are on a fixed income, unemployed or underemployed, or paid low wages, these funds can be a lifeline. See instruction below.
2. **Contact your utility now.** The utility MUST offer you a payment plan of at least 12 months with no down payment. See instructions below.

*Maryland Office of People's Counsel
410-767-8150; 800-207-4055*

www.opc.maryland.gov

September 2, 2020

Energy Assistance

1. **There are energy assistance funds available.** As ratepayers and taxpayers, we pay for these funds. **You do not need a turn-off notice to apply.**
2. **Remember: The funds can help with past-due bills and reduce current bills.**
3. **Apply to the Office of Home Energy Program (OHEP) ASAP**
 - a. **Online:** <https://mydhrbenefits.dhr.state.md.us/>
 - b. **Mail:** Contact your local energy assistance office to be mailed an application. If you are unsure of your local energy assistance office call 800-332-6347.
 - c. **Call:** Contact your local energy assistance office or 800-332-6347 for an application or to ask questions.
 - d. **Walk-in or Schedule an appointment:** Some local energy assistance offices are seeing clients. Contact your local energy assistance office to find out how they are operating.
 - e. **Information:** <https://dhs.maryland.gov/office-of-home-energy-programs>
4. **Not eligible for OHEP? A little over-income?**
 - a. Fuel Fund (Central Maryland):
 - i. Apply online at www.fuefundmaryland.org
 - ii. Call 410-235-9080 and press option 1
 - b. Washington Area Fuel Fund: Contact your local Salvation Army
 - i. Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's: 301-638-9532
 - ii. Frederick: 301-662-2311
 - iii. Montgomery: 301-515-5354
 - iv. Prince George's: 301-277-6103
 - c. Check out our Resource Guides at www.opc.maryland.gov.
5. **Eligibility: Maximum monthly income**
 - a. **1-person household:** \$1,861
 - b. **3-Person household:** \$3,168

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6. **Unemployment:** The extra \$600 per week in Unemployment Benefits will not be counted as income.
7. **Average FY20 OHEP grants:**
 - a. Bill assistance: \$467
 - b. Electric past-due bills: \$862
 - c. Gas past-due bills: \$607
8. **Check out our resources** at www.opc.maryland.gov.

Utility Payment Plans (PSC Temporary Rules) – Past-Due Bills

1. Every electric, gas, landline (phone), and private water utility must comply with these rules.
2. **Take action now** to make sure you are protected from utility-shut-offs on November 15 or later.
3. **Contact your utility ASAP.** Tell them you want a payment plan. If you have applied for OHEP assistance, tell them. See rules below.

Temporary Payment Plan Rules

1. Utilities must offer everyone a **minimum 12-month payment plan.**
 - a. If they do not offer you one up-front, tell them you want one.
 - b. If you have a high past-due bill, and you need a longer plan, give them information: household income; applications for energy assistance; special circumstances such as serious medical conditions, reliance on electricity for medical equipment, telehealth and distance learning
2. OHEP-Certified Customers: **Minimum 24-month payment plan.**
3. **Downpayments:** Utilities cannot require them as part of plan.
4. **Security Deposits:** Utilities cannot require them as part of plan.

5. **Did you fall behind on a prior payment plan during the past 18 months?** The utility cannot deny you this plan because you fell behind or defaulted on a prior plan.