

Maryland Office of People's Counsel

ALERT

Utility Bill Assistance for Furloughed and Federal Employees

On Friday, January 11, 2019, furloughed and essential federal employees did not receive paychecks. At this time it is not clear when the partial shutdown of the federal government will end. What is clear is that many of these households will have trouble paying monthly bills, including utility bills. The employees may apply for unemployment insurance, but there will be a delay, and the amounts likely will be significantly less than the amount in the paycheck.

OPC has been told that all the major gas and electric utilities and Verizon have agreed to exercise flexibility with bill payment problems for these employees. Baltimore City also has announced similar flexibility. We do not have information about policies of the smaller utilities or WSSC.

Any agency that is contacted by a federal employee affected by the partial shutdown and in need of an extension or a payment plan should do the following:

- Inform the customers that they should contact the gas, electric or private water utility immediately, and:
- Explain the situation
- Plan to have income information and the federal ID and furlough letter available, if needed. Baltimore City DPW will require the ID and letter.
- State a specific request: for example, a temporary extension to make the payment and waive the late fee; a payment plan to reduce the current monthly payment amount while the partial shutdown is in effect

If the utility (but not WSSC or Baltimore City) will not assist the customer, she should file a complaint with the Public Service Commission at www.psc.state.md.us.

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