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.
   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.
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.fuelfundmaryland.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

5. **Eligibility: Maximum monthly income**
   a. **1-person household:** $1,861
   b. **3-Person household:** $3,168
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](http://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.

*Maryland Office of People’s Counsel*
*410-767-8150; 800-207-4055*
*[www.opc.maryland.gov](http://www.opc.maryland.gov)*
*September 2, 2020*
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.