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
   - **Online:** https://mydhrbenefits.dhr.state.md.us/
   - **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.
   - **Call:** Contact your local energy assistance office or 800-332-6347 for an application or to ask questions.
   - **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.
   - **Information:** [https://dhs.maryland.gov/office-of-home-energy-programs](https://dhs.maryland.gov/office-of-home-energy-programs)

4. Not eligible for OHEP? A little over-income?
   - **Fuel Fund (Central Maryland):**
     i. Apply online at www.fuelfundmaryland.org
     ii. Call 410-235-9080 and press option 1
   - **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
   - **Check out our Resource Guides at** [www.opc.maryland.gov](http://www.opc.maryland.gov)

5. Eligibility: Maximum monthly income
   - **1-person household:** $1,861
   - **3-Person household:** $3,168

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September 2, 2020
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.
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.