

## **COVID-19: What Customers Should Know About Their Water Bill**

Governor Hogan declared a State of Emergency for Maryland on March 5, 2020. On March 16, he announced an Executive Order prohibiting the termination of public services. These include water and sewage services, electric, gas, as well as phone, cable, and internet services. The Order also prohibits the collection of late fees during this time. This moratorium applies to private water companies and public water utilities during the State of Emergency.

The length of time for the suspension of late fees and terminations may vary depending on your water provider, but must last at least as long as the State of Emergency. To learn more about the termination and late fee suspension dates you must speak with your water provider directly.

### **1. Should I still pay my water bill during the suspension of terminations and late fees?**

Yes! You should make every effort to stay current on all water bill payments. Once the suspension is lifted, you will be responsible for all water usage and bill payments. It is important to make payments on your monthly bill and any past-due balances – even if they are partial payments. You will still receive your water bill each month. Do your best to stay current on your water payment so that you do not get behind. If you experience a loss of income due to COVID-19 restrictions and have trouble paying your bill, contact your water provider to discuss payment arrangements to help during this time.

**Baltimore City residents.** Check out available assistance programs described below or our Baltimore City Resource Guide in the Publications section at [www.opc.maryland.gov](http://www.opc.maryland.gov).

**WSSC Customers.** Check our WSSC's available programs at [www.wsscwater.com](http://www.wsscwater.com) or in our Montgomery County and Prince George's County Resource Guides in the Publications section at [www.opc.maryland.gov](http://www.opc.maryland.gov).

### **2. If I can't make a payment right now, will I get a late fee added to my bill?**

If you have a past due water bill reach out to your provider to make a payment plan. In accordance with the Executive Order water companies must suspend all terminations and late fees at this time. We do not know if the moratorium will continue after the Governor lifts the State of Emergency.

### **3. What can I do if my water is off right now?**

OPC recommends that you contact your water provider to try and work out a payment plan. Let them know of any layoff or reduced income as a result of the State of Emergency. Some water companies are restoring previously terminated households in light of this emergency situation. Contact your provider directly to discuss the specifics of your account.

Office of People's Counsel  
[www.opc.maryland.gov](http://www.opc.maryland.gov)  
[DLInfo OPC@maryland.gov](mailto:DLInfo OPC@maryland.gov)  
410-767-8150; 800-207-4055

There may be other resources to help. Please contact us at [DLInfo OPC@maryland.gov](mailto:DLInfo OPC@maryland.gov) or review our resource guides at [www.opc.maryland.gov](http://www.opc.maryland.gov) to learn about different programs that might be able to assist you.

#### 4. Can I still make payments on my water bill?

Yes. While there are suspensions on non-payment service terminations, you can still make payments to your account. For most water providers you can mail, call, or go online to make a payment. Most walk-on offices are closed due to COVID-19. OPC recommends that you continue to make payments even though your water service cannot be terminated at this time.

#### 5. I have contacted my water provider about working out a payment plan and they have not assisted me. What do I do now?

Remember: Your water provider cannot turn off your service during the active moratorium. However, you will be subject to a turn-off if you are behind on your bill after the moratorium is lifted by the Governor. It is a good idea to be proactive in managing your bill during the emergency. If you are served by a private water company (not a government utility or WSSC), and your water provider will not agree to assist you, you can submit a complaint to the Consumer Assistance Division of the Public Service Commission (PSC/CAD). Due to the limitations on public agencies, you will need to submit the complaint online at [www.psc.state.md.us](http://www.psc.state.md.us). If you are not able to fill out the form online, contact OPC at 410-767-8150 and leave a message with your name and phone number and state the problem, and someone will contact you to assist you. Please look at the OPC Information Sheet "[How to Negotiate During the State of Emergency](#)" to assist you in making the request.

### **Water Bill Assistance for Baltimore City**

#### [Current BH2O Bill Assistance Customers](#)

To ease the burden on those currently enrolled in BH2O, the Department of Public Works will bypass the annual verification process, allowing them to automatically remain in the program for the coming year.

To learn more about or apply to BH2O visit their [website](#).

#### [Apply to BH2O if you are a Baltimore City Resident](#)

Limited-income customers may be eligible for Baltimore City water bill assistance programs. There is one application for all Baltimore City water bill assistance programs.

*Who is eligible?*

Any Maryland resident who meets income guidelines is eligible to apply to BH2O.

FY 2020 Income Guidelines For BH2O		
Household Size	Max. Monthly Income	Max. Yearly Income
1 –3	\$3,030	\$37,328
4	\$4,290	\$45,063
5	\$4,920	\$52,798
6	\$5,550	\$60,533
7	\$5,689	\$68,268
8	\$6,334	\$76,003

*How do I apply?*

As the state responds to the COVID-19 pandemic, Baltimore City will continue to accept applications and process benefit payments. In order to limit person-to-person contact the walk-in sites are closed to the public. During the State of Emergency there are two ways you can apply:

- **Mail-in:** You can go online to download a copy of the application at <https://publicworks.baltimorecity.gov/Water-Billing-Programs-to-Assist-Residents>. Completed applications can be mailed to P.O. Box 22586, Baltimore MD 21203.
- **Email:** You can go online to download a copy of the application at <https://publicworks.baltimorecity.gov/Water-Billing-Programs-to-Assist-Residents>. Email your completed application to [bbcaph2o@baltimorecity.gov](mailto:bbcaph2o@baltimorecity.gov).

Processing times and payment disbursement times should not be affected by these temporary changes.

**New Water Bill Assistance Program**

Beginning May 8, there will be an **Emergency COVID-19 Discount for any Baltimore City water account holder who shows proof of Unemployment Insurance eligibility**. The discount will provide the same assistance that eligible BH2O participants currently receive, a 43% discount on charges for water and sewer usage and a waiver of Bay Restoration and Storm Water Remediation fees. This is a significant reduction in the water and sewer bill.

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[DLInfo OPC@maryland.gov](mailto:DLInfo OPC@maryland.gov)  
410-767-8150; 800-207-4055

*Who is eligible?*

Any Baltimore City water account holder who shows proof of Unemployment Insurance eligibility. Eligibility will remain in place until 90 days after the end of the current State of Emergency or Dec 31, 2020, whichever comes first. The discount is good for one year.

*How do I apply?*

On May 8 the application will be available online. There are two ways you can apply.

- **Online:** You can go to either website listed below to apply online.  
[www.cityservices.baltimorecity.gov/BH20](http://www.cityservices.baltimorecity.gov/BH20)  
[www.bmorechildren.com/bh2o](http://www.bmorechildren.com/bh2o)
- **Mail:** You can print the application and mail it to the BH2O Processing Center at P.O Box 22586, Baltimore, MD 21203. The Water Billing Customer Call Center and the Customer Walk-In Center will be closed for the foreseeable future and only emergency water maintenance issues will be addressed.

**\*\*If your employment was affected by the emergency closures you may be eligible for Unemployment Benefits. To learn more about possible Unemployment Benefits visit [www.dllr.state.md.us](http://www.dllr.state.md.us) or call 800-827-4839.**