

# Office of People’s Counsel **RESOURCE GUIDE** **Utility Bill Assistance in HOWARD COUNTY**

Contents:	<u>Page</u>
1-2-3 Utility Bill Assistance at a Glance .....	2
Utility shut-offs and serious illness & life support.....	3
Electric and Gas Utility Programs.....	4
Energy Assistance Programs—OHEP .....	5
• MD Energy Assistance Program (MEAP)	
• Electric Universal Service Program (EUSP)	
Energy Efficiency and Conservation.....	6-7
Department of Social Services (DSS) .....	8
• Emergency Assistance to Families w/Children (EAFC)	
• Flex Funds	
• Welfare Avoidance Grant (WAG)	
• Special and Local Funds	
• Office on Aging	
Private Charities & Other Funds .....	9
• Fuel Funds	
• Private Charities	
• Federal Emergency Management Assistance (FEMA)	
Tax Credits.....	10
Mortgage Payment Assistance.....	11
Telephone Bill Assistance.....	12-13
Water Bill Assistance.....	14
Other Assistance Programs.....	15
Assistance Flowchart.....	16
MD PSC Complaint Form.....	17-20
Physician’s Certification of Serious Illness.....	21

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For corrections, please contact us by  
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**REVISED**  
 April 2017

# HOWARD COUNTY RESOURCE GUIDE

## 1-2-3 Utility Bill Assistance

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### 1. Apply for MEAP and EUSP energy assistance.

Limited-income customers may be eligible for Maryland state energy assistance programs that can help with utility bills. A detailed description of these programs are provided on page four. There is one application for all Maryland state energy assistance programs.

**Maryland Energy Assistance Program (MEAP)** distributes funds for gas, oil, electricity and other home heating and cooling bills to limited income individuals and families.

**Electric Universal Service Program (EUSP)** is a program that helps low-income electricity customers pay their electric bills. Some customers who are not eligible for MEAP are eligible for EUSP.

Enrollment in these programs is not automatic. You must meet eligibility requirements and apply with a local assistance agency. Local assistance offices are listed in this guide. For locations in other counties, contact the Maryland Office of Home Energy Programs (1-800-352-1446).

### 2. Ask about other energy assistance funds.

Supplementary assistance may be obtained from a local Fuel Fund, or other state or local programs. Information about some of these programs is included in this packet and can be obtained from your local energy assistance office.

Agencies that may be able to provide assistance include those entities that work with senior citizens, persons with disabilities or faith-based organizations.

### 3. Try to work out a payment arrangement.

If you still owe money to the utility after applying for energy assistance, or did not qualify for assistance, you should contact your utility to work out a reasonable payment arrangement for the past due amount. If you try to work out a reasonable payment arrangement and are not successful, contact the Public Service Commission (PSC) at 410-767-8028 (press "1" at the prompt) to make a complaint. The PSC complaint form is enclosed in this packet.

## *HOWARD COUNTY RESOURCE GUIDE*

### **Utility Shut-Offs and Serious Illness & Life Support**

If you have received a shut-off notice and someone in the home is seriously ill or needs life support equipment, contact the utility immediately. If you present a Public Service Commission **Medical Certification Form** stating that termination of electric, gas or both will aggravate an existing serious illness or prevent the use of life-support equipment, a utility may not terminate service for an initial period of up to 30 days beyond the scheduled date of service termination.

**The medical certification does not prevent shut-offs indefinitely.** The customer must take steps to resolve the unpaid bills to avoid service termination in the future.

**If you are off-service already, the utility does not have to restore service unless the utility bills are paid.** However, we recommend that you contact the utility, inform them of the medical situation, take steps to get assistance with the bills, and try to work out a payment plan.

#### THINGS TO REMEMBER:

- Call the utility **immediately** to inform them of the situation
- Submit a Medical Certification form to the utility immediately
  - Send the form by fax, email (with scanned copy) or hard copy
  - Use the attached form (temporary until revised by the PSC)
  - A medical professional must sign the certification form
  - **NEW: Certified Nurse Practitioners and Physicians Assistants** can now sign the form in addition to physicians
- The customer must promptly (within 30 days) enter into an agreement with the utility for the payment of outstanding utility bills
  - If you are low-income or will have difficulty paying the bills, you should:
    - Apply immediately for MEAP or EUSP energy assistance if you meet the income guidelines
    - If in the hospital or receiving outpatient treatment for a serious illness, speak with the social worker or navigator for assistance
    - If over the age of 60, contact the Department on Aging
- Contact the utility to work out a reasonable payment arrangement with the utility
- If the utility will not work out a reasonable plan, file a complaint with the Commission

# HOWARD COUNTY RESOURCE GUIDE

## Electric and Natural Gas Utilities

### Electric and Natural Gas:

#### **BALTIMORE GAS & ELECTRIC**

P. O. Box 1475  
 Baltimore, MD 21203-1475  
 1-800-685-0123  
 Credit & Collections: 1-800-685-2210  
 Report an outage: 877-778-2222  
 www.bge.com

## Electric & Gas Utility Programs

### **BUDGET BILLING (EVEN MONTHLY PAYMENTS).**

Utilities offer Budget Billing (an even monthly payment plan) for customers. This allows a customer to pay the same amount every month based on their expected annual usage. This amount may change periodically if you use more or less gas or electricity than expected. The program does not eliminate monthly charges on the bill, but it does even them out. The program is especially helpful if a customer wants to maintain a fairly fixed amount of expenses throughout the year.

### **BILL EXTENDER PLAN.**

Utilities are required to adjust a customer's bill due date if they receive monthly income through Social Security or another government-sponsored assistance program. This can help avoid late payment fees, since a customer can pay the bill after receipt of their monthly income.

### **UTILITY SERVICE PROTECTION PROGRAM (USPP).**

The USPP program is designed to protect households from utility service terminations during the winter. The program, established by the Public Service Commission (PSC), is available to MEAP recipients. USPP provides assistance, such as reconnection fee and security deposit waivers, to off-service customers. A customer must enroll in the company's Budget Billing program and apply the MEAP grant to the heating company bill.

### **PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS WITH THE UTILITY.**

A customer who is having difficulty paying their gas or electric bills should ask the utility about a payment plan to pay past-due bills over time. A deferred payment plan should take a customer's individual circumstances into account, including other available assistance, income, and the amount owed. If the utility will not work with the customer to establish reasonable payment arrangements, the customer should contact the Public Service Commission's Office of External Relations immediately to request help to mediate acceptable payment arrangement terms. This is the only way to stop service termination when there is a dispute.

### **DISPUTES WITH THE UTILITY.**

A customer should contact the utility first to request information or resolve a dispute. If it is not resolved, a customer may file a complaint with the PSC.

### **MARYLAND PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION (PSC)**

6 St. Paul Street, Suite 1501  
 Baltimore, MD 21202-3486  
 Phone: 410-767-8028, press "1" at prompt  
 Toll-free: 1-800-492-0474  
 Fax: 410-333-6844  
 Website: www.psc.state.md.us

## Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP) - Energy Assistance Programs

### MARYLAND ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (MEAP)

MEAP is an energy assistance program that helps low-income households with their heating bills, and at times, with their cooling bills. The program is available to households that meet the OHEP income requirements and heat with electricity, gas, oil, propane, wood, or other sources. Grant amounts vary depending on household size, household income, and heating source.

### ELECTRIC UNIVERSAL SERVICE PROGRAM (EUSP)

EUSP is a program that helps low-income electricity customers pay their electricity bills. The program is available to households that meet the OHEP income requirements. The program includes Bill Payment Assistance and Arrearage assistance of up to \$2,000 once every seven years when applicable. EUSP Bill Payment Assistance requires customers to enroll in Budget Billing. The annual EUSP Bill Payment is then applied through the electric company's Budget Billing program.

OHEP will maintain the existing waiver to the Arrearage Program requirement that allows any applicant who received \$300 or less within seven-years to apply for additional Arrearage funds.

In addition, OHEP provides an additional waiver for 'vulnerable households' who received \$800 or less within the past 7 years. Vulnerable households will be defined as having a member of the household who is over 65 years of age or under two years of age, and members who are medical fragile. The PSC medical certification form (found in this packet) can be used as proof of medical eligibility.

**Important New:** Beginning July 1, 2016 the OHEP application is a Point in Time application. A customer must apply for all three grants (EUSP, MEAP, and Arrearage) at the same time. Only if a change in income would cause a customer to be placed in a lower benefit level, can they apply for Arrearage at a later date. MEAP and EUSP are not available at a later date. If customers do not receive EUSP at the time of their original application, they will not be eligible to apply for Arrearage at a later date, as the prerequisite to Arrearage is that the customer receives EUSP.

#### FY 2017 OHEP ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES for MEAP and EUSP

Household Size	Max. Monthly Income	Max. Yearly Income
1	\$1,733	\$20,790
2	\$2,336	\$28,035
3	\$2,940	\$35,280
4	\$3,544	\$42,525
5	\$4,148	\$49,770
6	\$4,751	\$57,015
For each Additional person, add	\$607	\$7,280.00

### DOCUMENTS NEEDED WHEN APPLYING FOR ASSISTANCE

One-Stop-Shop: There is only ONE application to apply for Maryland Energy Assistance Program (MEAP), Electric Universal Service Program (EUSP), Utility Service Protection Plan (USPP), and Department of Housing and Community Development's (DHCD) EmPOWER Low Income Energy Efficiency Program (LIEEP).

A customer should plan to bring (or mail) copies of the following documents when applying for grants or assistance:

1. **Picture Identification.** Driver's license, MD ID, employment ID, DSS ID, or INS Green Card.
2. **Proof of Residence.** Property tax bill (for homeowners); lease or rent book (for renters); or mail received at the subject address.
3. **Proof of Income.** Pay stubs (last four to seven weeks); unemployment insurance check stubs; benefit letter from TCA, SSI, SSDI, VA, Social Security; pension benefits; disability check; worker's compensation; or any other receipt of income.
4. **Social Security Cards** for all members of the household over age 2.
5. **Energy Usage.** Most recent utility bill, heating fuel bill, and/or turn-off notice.
6. **Landlord information.** Name, address and telephone number of landlord.

#### COMMUNITY ACTION COUNCIL OF HOWARD COUNTY

6751 Columbia Gateway Drive, 2nd Floor  
Columbia, MD 21046,  
Phone: 410-313-6440, Fax: 410-313-6479  
Mon., Tue., Thur., Fri. 8:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.  
(closed for lunch 12:00pm - 1:00pm)  
Wed. open at 1:00pm

#### NORTH LAUREL/SAVAGE MULTI-SVC. CTR.

9900 Washington Blvd., Suite I  
Laurel, MD 20723  
Phone: 410-313-0223  
Mon., Tue., Thur., Fri. 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.  
Wed. 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.

*Questions or concerns about Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP) or Department of Social Services (DSS) should be referred to:*

**DHR CONSTITUENT SERVICES**  
**Toll-free: 1-800-332-6347**

**To check the status of your Energy Assistance application please go to [myohepstatus.org](http://myohepstatus.org)**

# HOWARD COUNTY RESOURCE GUIDE

## Energy Efficiency and Conservation

### DHCD Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) / Empower MD / Limited Income Energy Efficiency Program (LIEEP)

The Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) administers energy efficiency and conservation programs for low-income customers. Limited income households **up to 200% of the FPL** who own or rent a home are eligible for these programs. DHCD gives priority to households who meet MEAP/EUSP guidelines (p. 5) and are elderly or disabled, have minor children in the home, or have high energy consumption.

**Applications:** OHEP applicants who are eligible for energy assistance will be referred automatically to DHCD for energy efficiency services unless the applicant opts out of the referral. Other individuals can apply directly to DHCD (see below).

#### Services:

Energy audits

Measures: Insulation and caulking; replacement windows and doors

Systems: Furnace cleaning and tuning; repair or replacement of furnaces; installation of efficient refrigerators and water heaters

#### Additional LIEEP Services (electric only):

Lighting retrofits

Related health and safety measures

***You must use the OHEP application when applying for LIEEP***

CURRENT LIEEP INCOME ELIGIBILITY LIMITS  
(200% Federal Poverty Guidelines)

Size of Family unit	Max. Monthly income	Max. Yearly Income
1	\$1,980	\$23,760
2	\$2,670	\$32,040
3	\$3,360	\$40,320
4	\$4,050	\$48,600
5	\$4,740	\$56,880
6	\$5,430	\$65,160
7	\$6,122	\$73,460
8	\$6,815	\$81,780
For each additional person, add:	\$693	\$8,320

**County WAP:** Community Action Council of Howard County Call 410-313-1181

*For additional assistance, or for those that are over income for OHEP but meet WAP / Empower MD LIEEP income guidelines see chart (above) Call DHCD – WAP 1-855-583-8976 or 410-514-7621.*

*Housing and Building Energy Programs  
EmPOWER Low Income Energy Efficiency Program (LIEEP)  
Community Development Administration  
100 Community Place  
Crownsville, MD 21032  
[www.dhcd.maryland.gov](http://www.dhcd.maryland.gov)*

## HOWARD COUNTY RESOURCE GUIDE

### Energy Efficiency and Conservation Non—Low Income

#### ***BGE Smart Energy Savers Program / EMPOWER MD:***

**Heating and Cooling Rebates:** Rebates for HVAC equipment, quality installation, diagnostic tune-ups, and duct sealing.

**Home Performance with Energy Star:** Comprehensive home energy audit followed by rebates and/or home energy improvement loans for home energy efficiency improvements.

**Lighting Discounts:** Discounts on qualifying compact fluorescent lights (CFLs) and light fixtures.

**Appliance Rebates:** Rebates for qualifying refrigerators, clothes washers, and room air conditioning units.

**Refrigerator and Freezer Recycling Rebates:** Rebates for recycling old refrigerators or freezers in working order.

**Energy Star for New Homes:** Energy Star qualified homes can include a variety of energy-efficient features.

**PeakRewards Program:** Central air conditioning unit or electric heat pump cycling to use less electricity. Sign-up credits and summer bill credits.

**Quick Home Energy Check-up:** A Check-up professional performs a one-hour walk through of a customer's home to assess insulation levels, air leakage, heating and cooling systems, windows and doors, lighting and appliances, and water heating equipment. After the Check-up is complete, a customer receives a summary of findings and a list of improvements to help reduce energy usage. In addition, a Check-up professional will install at least three of five energy-savings items.

**1-877-685-7377; [www.bgesmartenergy.com](http://www.bgesmartenergy.com)**

# HOWARD COUNTY RESOURCE GUIDE

## Department of Social Services (DSS) - Energy Assistance

Each local DSS agency has discretion to allocate the funds described below in different ways. If a customer is not currently receiving services through DSS (e.g. TCA, TEMHA), he or she can still contact the local DSS agency for possible assistance with housing and energy emergencies. Please note that all of these grants are highly discretionary and based on funding availability.

### EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE TO FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN (EAFC)

EAFC is an emergency grant program that may be accessed once every 24 months. The grant may be used for household emergencies, including utility bills. It is available to families with one or more children under the age of 21, who are related to (and reside with) the applicant. A person does not have to be receiving any state assistance to apply for an emergency grant. However, he or she must document individual circumstances.

### FLEX FUNDS

Flex Funds may be available for households in order to maintain or reunify children with their families. These monies are available for a variety of needs, but the goods and services purchased must be related to the child's or family's needs. These funds may also be available for vulnerable adults in households without children depending on the situation and need.

### WELFARE AVOIDANCE GRANT (WAG)

A WAG grant provides cash assistance to avoid the need for TCA and/or other benefits. Payment is made on behalf of a family with children for immediate and limited work-related needs. This is not an entitlement program. Funding is limited and can only be used for needs directly related to obtaining or maintaining employment such as vehicle repairs and job-related equipment. Persons who receive a WAG cannot receive TCA benefits for a specified time period.

### "SPECIAL" OR "LOCAL" FUNDS

"Special" or "local" funds are charitable or local funds available for household emergencies. Local jurisdictions set eligibility criteria and grant amounts. Funds are intermittent and limited and allocated based upon a household's income and level of need.

*For more information or to apply for any of these DSS funds, contact:*

### HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

7121 Columbia Gateway Drive  
Columbia, MD 21046  
410-872-8700 x6020  
Fax: 410-872-4222

*\*Community Action Council of Howard County also accepts applications for EAFC.*

### ASSISTANCE FOR SENIORS

*Senior Citizens (or their caregiver) with a utility emergency should call for information and assistance at:*

**HOWARD CO. OFFICE ON AGING**  
**MD Access Point of Howard Co.**  
6751 Columbia Gateway Dr. Suite 200  
Columbia, MD 21046  
410-313-5980  
Toll free: 1-800-506-5806  
Fax: 410-313-5970  
Email: [map@howardcountymd.gov](mailto:map@howardcountymd.gov)

If you have questions or concerns with DSS, call:

**DHR CONSTITUENT SERVICES**  
**Toll-free: 1-800-332-6347**



# HOWARD COUNTY RESOURCE GUIDE

## Private Charities & Other Funds

### FUEL FUNDS

Local Fuel Funds are charities that offer financial assistance to limited-income individuals with a utility bill crisis. This includes individuals that have had their service terminated or have received a turn-off notice. Generally, all Fuel Funds use the 200% of Poverty Income Guidelines (see pg. 6) for eligibility and require applicants to exhaust all other funding sources. Most, if not all, Fuel Funds partner with the local utility companies. The local Fuel Fund will determine the maximum dollar amount they can provide to each applicant.

Fuel Fund assistance is only available once in a 12-month period and applicants are highly encouraged to complete an energy conservation education course (WATT Watchers) through the Fuel Fund. Many local Fuel Funds require monies to be applied to the primary heating source of the applicant (gas, electric, oil, propane, kerosene, wood, etc.). Check with your local Fuel Fund for application and program rules.

To apply for the **Fuel Fund** or other charitable funding contact the following agencies:

#### **COMMUNITY ACTION COUNCIL OF HOWARD COUNTY**

6751 Columbia Gateway Drive, 2nd Floor  
Columbia, MD 21046,  
Phone: 410-313-6440, Fax: 410-313-6479  
Mon., Tue., Thur., Fri. 8:30 a.m.– 3:30 p.m.  
(closed for lunch 12:00pm - 1:00pm)  
Wed. open at 1:00pm

#### **NORTH LAUREL/SAVAGE MULTI-SVC. CTR.**

9900 Washington Blvd., Suite I  
Laurel, MD 20723  
Phone: 410-313-0223  
Mon., Tue., Thur., Fri. 8:30 a.m.- 4:30 p.m.  
Wed. 11 a.m.- 7 p.m.

**You can also apply online at Fuel Fund of Maryland**

<http://www.fuelfundmaryland.org/home>

### FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (FEMA) FUNDS

Each year, FEMA (the Federal agency responsible for providing disaster relief) distributes certain emergency funds to the state. These funds are available in certain local jurisdictions throughout the State of Maryland, and may be used for utility emergencies.

For more information or to apply for **FEMA**, contact:

#### **HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

7121 Columbia Gateway Drive  
Columbia, MD 21046  
410-872-8700 x6020  
Fax: 410-872-4222

For more information on **FEMA**, contact:

#### **Ms. Jacqueline Scott, Deputy Director Howard Co. Dept. of Citizens Services**

6751 Columbia Gateway Dr. Suite 300  
Columbia, MD 21046  
Phone: 410-313-6400  
Fax: 410-313-6424  
Mon.—Fri. 8:00a.m—5:00p.m.

**\*\*ALERT\*\***

If you have trouble contacting any Fuel Fund agencies on this page please contact 2-1-1 for assistance.

# HOWARD COUNTY RESOURCE GUIDE

## Tax Credits

### EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is a special federal tax credit for limited income workers. If qualified for the federal EITC, you may be entitled to a Maryland EITC on your state return equal to 50 percent of the federal EITC, as well as a local earned income tax credit. A person may be eligible for a tax credit even if he or she does not owe any taxes. However, a tax return must be filed.

### CHILD TAX CREDIT

The Child Tax Credit is a federal special tax credit for limited income families. A person may be eligible for this tax credit of at least \$600 per child even if he or she does not owe any taxes. However, a tax return must be filed.

### HOMESTEAD TAX CREDIT

To help homeowners deal with large assessment increases on their principal residence, state law has established the Homestead Property Tax Credit. The Homestead Credit limits the increase in taxable assessments each year to a fixed percentage. Every county and municipality in Maryland is required to limit taxable assessment increases to 10% or less each year. Homeowners must submit a one-time application to establish eligibility for the credit. For more information visit: <http://dat.maryland.gov/realproperty/Pages/Maryland-Homestead-Tax-Credit.aspx>

**For questions about the EITC or Child Tax Credit or any other federal tax, call:**

**Internal Revenue Service (IRS)**  
1-800-829-1040

**For questions about any Maryland state tax credit, call:**

**Office of the Comptroller of MD**  
410-260-7980

### FREE TAX SERVICES

To take advantage of various tax credits, there are free tax services for elderly, disabled, non-English speaking, and limited income households.

**AARP TAX-AIDE**  
1-888-227-7669

**1ST CALL FOR HELP**  
1-800-492-0618

### RENTER'S TAX CREDIT

The Renter's Tax Credit (RTC) is a Maryland tax credit offered to limited income renters. Renters who are 60 or over, or 100% disabled, may qualify if their rent amount exceeds the amount set based on their income. Renters under 60 may qualify if they meet the household size income limits as well as other program criteria.

For more information about the program and qualification criteria visit <http://dat.maryland.gov/realproperty/Pages/Renters'-Tax-Credits.aspx>

### HOMEOWNER'S PROPERTY TAX CREDIT

This tax credit is available to Maryland homeowners whose property taxes exceed a fixed percentage of their incomes. The program is available to qualified homeowners regardless of age.

Visit <http://dat.maryland.gov/realproperty/Pages/Homeowners'-Property-Tax-Credit-Program.aspx> for more information about the program.

**For questions about the Homestead, Renter's or Homeowner's Tax Credits, contact:**

### MD Department of Assessment and Taxation

301 W. Preston Street, Room 900  
Baltimore, MD 21201  
410-767-1184; 888-246-5941

**OR**

### Howard County—Maryland Assessment Office

3451 Courthouse Drive  
Ellicott City, Maryland 21043  
(410) 480-7940

***Applications and documents must be received by September 1st of each year.***

# *HOWARD COUNTY RESOURCE GUIDE*

## **HOUSING AND MORTGAGE ASSISTANCE**

### **FORECLOSURE ASSISTANCE**

If you are in need of help with paying your mortgage or you are facing a home foreclosure, be sure to first contact your lender and ask to speak with the loss mitigation or loan modification department. Try to work out a reasonable loan workout, repayment plan, loan modification or forbearance agreement. In many cases, it is best to get help from an experienced housing counselor who works with lenders and homeowners on a daily basis. There are many different types of foreclosure assistance programs, but their availability is dependent on many factors that include, but are not limited to: who your lender, investor or insurer is, your household income, credit rating, debts and expenses, and type of hardship.

<p><b>Mortgage counseling assistance</b>  <a href="http://www.makinghomeaffordable.com">www.makinghomeaffordable.com</a>  <b>1-888-995-4673</b></p> <p><b>MDHOPE</b>  1-877-462-7555  <a href="http://www.mdhope.org">www.mdhope.org</a></p> <p>To find a counseling agency near you visit <a href="http://www.hud.gov">www.hud.gov</a> or <a href="http://mdhope.dhcd.maryland.gov/Counseling/Pages/CounselorsList.aspx">http://mdhope.dhcd.maryland.gov/Counseling/Pages/CounselorsList.aspx</a></p>	<p><b>Foreclosure Timeline and Mediation Process</b></p> <p><b>Step 1:</b> Lender can mail a Notice of Intent to Foreclose (NOI) 45 days prior to filing action to foreclose. This notice is typically sent after 90 days of delinquency.</p> <p><b>Step 2:</b> After 45 days from the date of the NOI, the lender can file an Order to Docket in Circuit Court.</p> <p><i>Maryland's new Foreclosure Mediation Law became effective July 1, 2010. The law requires mortgage lenders and servicers to be much more responsive to homeowners facing foreclosure. If the home facing foreclosure is a homeowner's principal residence, the homeowner will have the right to request mediation once the lender initiates foreclosure proceedings with the court system. At that time, the lender must send a "Request for Foreclosure Mediation" form. Homeowners will have 25 days to complete the form and file it with the circuit court. Homeowners must pay a non-refundable \$50 fee when they formally file this request for mediation.</i></p>
<p><b>Foreclosure fraud and rescue scams</b></p> <p>MD Dept. of Labor, Licensing &amp; Regulation  410-230-6097 /1-888-784-0136  <a href="http://www.dllr.state.md.us">www.dllr.state.md.us</a></p> <p><b>(click on "Mortgage Late? Don't Wait!")</b></p>	

### **Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) Loans**

**Maryland Housing Rehabilitation Program (MHRP)**- This program provides rehabilitation funds for housing or plumbing repairs for single family, owner-occupied properties and one to four unit rental properties. Loans may be used to correct exterior and interior deficiencies, make accessibility modification, correct health and safety violations, improve plumbing, wells and sewer, and for weatherization and energy conservation. You must be a Maryland resident who occupies the home as their principal residence, or rents to a family with a limited income at or below 80% of statewide median income.

**Accessible Homes for Seniors (AHFS)**- AHFS loans allow homeowners 55 plus to make needed accessibility improvements. Typical improvements include ramps, widening doorways, installing grab bars, adding a first floor laundry facility or bathrooms, and changing door and sink hardware to lever style handles. The program provides a zero percent interest, deferred loans for a term of 30 years to finance these accessibility improvements. For more information, contact AHFS at (301) 429-7821 or Toll Free 1-800-638-7781.

# HOWARD COUNTY RESOURCE GUIDE

## NEW!!! Telephone Bill Assistance

**LIFELINE** is a federal program, funded by all telephone customers, that helps to make telephone service more affordable. The program has provided eligible landline OR wireless customers with a discount on service or free minutes.

**NEW FCC Rules, effective on or after December 1, 2016**, will change the program in important ways, including automatic eligibility criteria, the inclusion of broadband (fixed and mobile) and the eventual phase-out of assistance for voice-only services. NOTE: The Start date may change depending on effective date of rules.

**Eligibility Criteria:** ≤ 135 percent of federal poverty level (as measured by IRS gross revenue) **OR:** **For New Subscribers who enroll after 12/1/2016 or for Current Lifeline subscribers who recertify on or after July 1, 2017:** SNAP (Food Supplement Program), Medicaid, SSI, Federal Housing Assistance, Veterans Pension and Survivors Benefits Programs and certain Tribal Program participation. **Excluded:** TDAP, LIHEAP, MEAP, EUSP, TANF, PAA, Section 8, and School Lunch participation.

**New Lifeline telephone subscribers who enroll before 12/1/2016 can do so under the current eligibility programs:** SNAP, Medicaid, SSI, PAA TANF, TDAP, LIHEAP, MEAP, EUSP, Section 8, and National School Lunch Programs participation.

**Voice and Broadband Services:** On or after 12/1/16, Lifeline customers will have the choice of applying their benefit to one of the following:

- Voice only (landline or wireless) – to be phased out by 2021
- Broadband only (fixed or mobile)
- Bundles: voice and broadband

### Things to Know About Lifeline Program

- All telephone customers pay for the Program through a Universal Service Fund (USF) charge on the bill.
- There is a flat discount rate of \$9.25 applied to voice; after 12/1/16, broadband OR bundled services.
- Service discounts can be applied to any voice service plan. However, **data and optional calling services are much more expensive than voice services, and Lifeline customers must pay for these services**, even if they get free or discounted “voice” minutes or service.
- Current Lifeline customers who switch providers to enroll in new broadband services, even bundled ones, will be considered “new” customers under the new eligibility rules.
- Only **one** Lifeline service is allowed per household. This means only one landline or wireless phone, or additionally after 12/1/16, one broadband service, or one bundled voice and broadband service per household. A “**household**” is an economic unit of **all adult** individuals who contribute to and share income and expenses.
- A resident in a group home, nursing home, assisted living or similar facility can be certified as one household for purposes of Lifeline eligibility. A worksheet must be filled out to establish eligibility at <http://www.usac.org.li/>.
- There is an annual re-certification requirement for **all** Lifeline customers

# HOWARD COUNTY RESOURCE GUIDE

## Telephone Bill Assistance

### Landline (Wired) Services: Verizon

**Basic:** Single telephone line with a maximum of 30 un-timed local calls per month.  
Charge: \$0.66 per month  
You cannot have any premium services and must pay all applicable federal, state and local taxes.  
**You will be charged for additional calls.**

OR

**Enhanced:** Single telephone line with unlimited local calls. Customer may purchase two value-added services and must pay all applicable federal, state, and local taxes.  
Charge: \$10.00 per month

*Waiver of Federal Subscriber Line Charges (FSLC) / waiver of installation fee / Collection of deposit is prohibited*

## Verizon's Medical and Senior Repair Prioritization Program

A Verizon customer who is **65 years or older** or who has a **medical condition requiring repair priority** can be pre-certified for repair priority **if** the customer is without alternative access to E911 service. **Alternative access** means having use of a cell phone or another telephone line in the household to call 911 services.

Customers who meet these conditions and file the appropriate certifications will receive priority for repairs (24-hour "out of service" repair commitment) when an outage is reported.

### Certificate Renewals

The **senior certificate** does **not** need to be renewed, and is valid until the account is closed or a billing name change is made to the account

The **medical certificate** is good for one year only if the medical condition is temporary. The customer will receive a notice 60 days before its expiration. If the condition is permanent, the certificate does not need to be renewed yearly.

### Medical Certification

The medical certificate may be signed by a licensed doctor, physician's assistant or nurse practitioner.

Applications for the program can be obtained at: [https://www.verizon.com/support/consumer/phone/repair-priority?CMP=DMC-CVZ\\_ZZ\\_ZZ\\_Z\\_DO\\_N\\_X00393](https://www.verizon.com/support/consumer/phone/repair-priority?CMP=DMC-CVZ_ZZ_ZZ_Z_DO_N_X00393)

### **Certifications must be mailed to:**

Maryland Repair Priority Program  
PO Box 5156  
Tampa, FL 33675

# HOWARD COUNTY RESOURCE GUIDE

## Water Bill Assistance

Most Maryland households receive water and sewer service through a local government or a quasi-government entity. These companies are not regulated by the MD PSC. If you need of help with paying your water bill from a public water source, you should contact your county executive or county commissioner's office for assistance.

Allen H. Kittleman, County Executive  
Office of County Executive  
George Howard Building, 3430 Courthouse Drive,  
Ellicott City, MD 21043  
(410) 313-2013; (410) 313-3000 (general information)  
e-mail: [akittleman@howardcountymd.gov](mailto:akittleman@howardcountymd.gov)  
web: [www.howardcountymd.gov/Branches/County-Executive](http://www.howardcountymd.gov/Branches/County-Executive)

DHR Constituent Services Unit  
311 West Saratoga Street  
Baltimore, MD 21201  
1 (800) 332-6347 ; TTY: (800) 925-4434

2-1-1 Maryland  
100 South Charles St., 5th Floor  
Baltimore, MD 21201  
Dial: 211; email: [INFO@211MD.ORG](mailto:INFO@211MD.ORG)

Department of Social Services (DSS) emergency assistance programs may assist with private and public water company bills especially if a service termination is threatened or has occurred. Contact your local Department of Social Services for assistance (page 8).

There are small private water companies in some Maryland counties. These companies are fully regulated by the MD PSC. The company should be contacted about working out a payment plan if there is a past due bill or if the bill amount is disputed. If the customer cannot get a satisfactory result, the customer may file a complaint about a disputed bill, or seek mediation assistance, with the MD PSC.

**There are currently NO Private water companies in the area:**

# HOWARD COUNTY RESOURCE GUIDE

## ***Other Assistance Programs***

### **Rental Allowance Program (RAP)**

The Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development provides grants to local governments to provide flat rent subsidies to low-income families who either are homeless or have an emergency housing need. The RAP program provides a monthly rental allowance towards a person's rent for up to 12 months to help move families from homelessness, or temporary emergency housing, into more permanent housing and obtain self-sufficiency.

To apply for RAP contact:

Howard County Housing Commission  
6751 Columbia Gateway Drive, 3rd Floor  
Columbia, MD 21046  
7410-313-6064

### **Tenant-Based Rental Assistance Program (TBRA)**

This program is made available through HUD's HOME program but administered through participating jurisdictions. TBRA is a rental subsidy that can help individual households afford housing costs such as rent, utility costs, security deposits, and/or utility deposits. The rental assistance portion may not exceed two years but may have an option to renew. Each participating jurisdiction is given some flexibility on how they use the funds and typically those that receive assistance have been referred from other community organizations.

### **Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA)**

This program, created by HUD, is used to address housing needs for low-income persons who are living with HIV/AIDS. Funds are distributed to states and cities by formula allocations and made available as part of the area's Consolidated Plan. Grantees partner with nonprofit organizations and housing agencies to provide housing and support to beneficiaries. HOPWA funds may be used for a wide range of housing, social services, program planning, and development costs. These include, but are not limited to, the acquisition, rehabilitation, or new construction of housing units; costs for facility operations; rental assistance; and short-term payments to prevent homelessness. HOPWA funds also may be used for health care and mental health services, chemical dependency treatment, nutritional services, case management, assistance with daily living, and other supportive services.

### **Low Intensity Support Services (LISS)**

This program is designed to enable a family to provide for the needs of a child or an adult with developmental disabilities. The program provides funding of up to \$3,000 per person per year and covers services including, but not limited to, family counseling, personal care, day care, health services, specialized equipment, transportation, and housing adaptations.

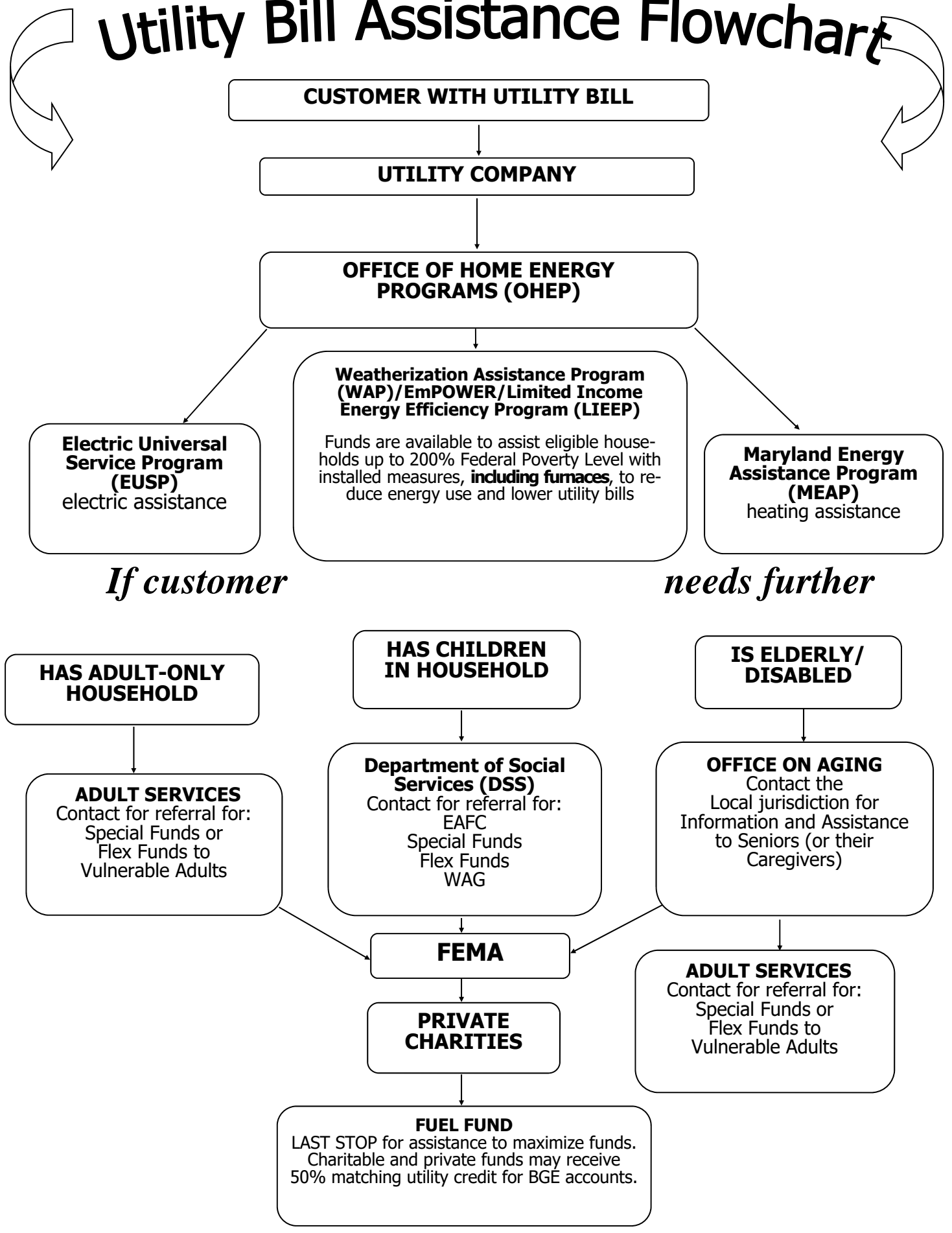
For more information or to apply for the program contact:

#### ***Penn-Mar Human Services***

310 Old Freeland Road  
Freeland, Maryland 21053  
Toll Free: 410-343-1069

Web Address: <http://www.penn-mar.org>

# Utility Bill Assistance Flowchart





# PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION (PSC) FORMS

The following forms include:

The PSC— INQUIRY / DISPUTE FORM

\*complaints can be made by telephone, internet, or direct mail\*

The PSC - PHYSICIAN CERTIFICATION OF SERIOUS ILLNESS OR LIFE SUPPORT

**OFFICE OF EXTERNAL RELATIONS  
MARYLAND PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION  
WILLIAM DONALD SCHAEFER TOWER  
6 ST. PAUL STREET  
BALTIMORE, MD 21202-6806  
TELEPHONE: 410-767-8028 OR 1-800-492-0474  
FAX: 410-333-6844  
INTERNET: <http://www.psc.state.md.us/psc/>**

**INQUIRY/DISPUTE FORM**

**Everyone must complete this section:**

Have you contacted the company regarding your inquiry/dispute? YES NO Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you received a response from the company? YES NO Date Received: \_\_\_\_\_

(If you received a written response, please provide a copy with this form.)

If you have not contacted the company, you must do so prior to filing a complaint with the Commission. If you contacted the company, you must wait for the company to have time to investigate the matter and respond to your complaint before pursuing the matter with the Commission. If after a reasonable period (2-6 weeks) you have not received a response from the company, you may file your complaint with the Commission. You may also file your complaint if you are dissatisfied with the company's response.

**TO BE COMPLETED BY EVERYONE [Please print and fill out neatly and completely]**

Name as it appears on bill: \_\_\_\_\_

Address as it appears on bill: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing address, if different from service address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Numbers (please include area code): (home) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ (work) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

(pager) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ (Fax) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ ("Can be reached") \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

Account Number or Order Number: \_\_\_\_\_

**Complaint concerns: (Check all that apply)**

Electric Company

Gas Supplier

Water Co.

Gas Company

Electric Supplier

Local Telephone Co.

Long Distance Co.

**PLEASE NOTE:** The Maryland PSC does not regulate the following companies: wireless, paging, oil, propane, Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission, and cable television providers. If your dispute concerns a wireless or paging co. you should file your dispute with the Federal Communications Commission at 1-888-225-5322 or you can contact the Attorney General's Office, Consumer Protection Division at 1-888-743-0023. If your dispute concerns cable television service please check the back of your cable bill for the local franchise office in your area. You should file your complaint with the franchise office listed on the bill or call the company and obtain that information. If your dispute concerned oil or propane companies, call the AGO at 888-743-0023. Finally, if your dispute concerned WSSC, you should file the dispute with the Manager of Customer Service for WSSC.

**Name of Company(ies) Against Whom You Are Complaining:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**If you are not the customer of record, please complete this section.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship to the customer: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime Phone No.: \_\_\_\_\_ Explain why customer cannot complete form: \_\_\_\_\_

*Note: you must have the customer's permission to file a complaint on their behalf. The PSC Investigator has the right to refuse to respond to a complaint if it cannot be verified that the customer of record gave you permission to file the dispute or his/her behalf.*

Are you have a billing dispute, please specify the amount in dispute? \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Did you pay the disputed bill? \_\_\_ YES \_\_\_ NO

**PLEASE COMPLETE IF YOUR COMPLAINT CONCERNS A TERMINATION NOTICE:**

Is your service currently on? \_\_\_ YES \_\_\_ NO

If your service is off, when was it turned off? \_\_\_\_\_

How much money is the utility requiring to restore service? \_\_\_\_\_

If your service is on, do you have a turn-off notice? \_\_\_ YES \_\_\_ NO Notice Amount? \_\_\_\_\_

If you are requesting an extension on a turn-off notice, and/or Alternative Payment Arrangements, you MUST indicate how much you are able to pay as a down payment, and list the amount and date(s) when you can make additional payments to reduce the past due amount. Any amount you list must be paid, in addition to your current bill.

My total past due bill is: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

My down payment is \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to be paid by \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to pay the remaining bill as follows:

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ to be paid by \_\_\_\_\_

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ to be paid by \_\_\_\_\_

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ to be paid by \_\_\_\_\_

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ to be paid by \_\_\_\_\_

Do you agree to participate in Budget Billing? \_\_\_ YES \_\_\_ NO

Have you paid a security deposit? \_\_\_ YES \_\_\_ NO Indicate Amount paid \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Is anyone in your household seriously ill or on life-support? \_\_\_ YES \_\_\_ NO

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Description of illness: \_\_\_\_\_

*(Please have your doctor submit a letter or your behalf.)*

If applicable, how many children are in the household? \_\_\_\_\_ Ages: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you applied for the Maryland Energy Assistance Program? \_\_\_ YES \_\_\_ NO

If yes, specify amount of grant expected/received: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Have you applied for the Electric Universal Service Program? \_\_\_ YES \_\_\_ NO

If yes, amount of grant expected/received \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

Are you now or have you ever participated in the Utility Service Protection Program (USPP)? \_\_\_ YES \_\_\_ NO

**TO BE COMPLETED BY EVERYONE: [If your complaint concerns a billing dispute, you must include copies of the disputed bills.]**

*Below briefly describe the basis for your dispute. If this is a billing dispute explain why you are disputing your bill. If you need payment arrangements, explain why you have fallen behind on your bills. If you are contacting us for any other reason, please use this space to state why you are contacting us today and how you would like us to assist you.*

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Please attach additional sheets if necessary. Also attach any relevant documentation (i.e. a copy of the bill(s), canceled checks, receipts, etc.) which will support your position.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Customer: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature of person completing form (if different): \_\_\_\_\_

**CERTIFICATION OF SERIOUS ILLNESS OR LIFE SUPPORT AND/OR PERMISSION  
FOR UTILITY TO RELEASE CONTACT INFORMATION IN A  
WEATHER-RELATED EMERGENCY**

**This is to certify that \_\_\_\_\_ is a resident at:**

**Street Address** \_\_\_\_\_

**City, State, Zip** \_\_\_\_\_

**Telephone Number** \_\_\_\_\_

**Relationship to Customer** \_\_\_\_\_

**Utility Account Number** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Note:** This form consists of two sections which provide different notices/approvals. You may complete and submit either or both sections as applicable, to your utility company.

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**SECTION ONE: Certification of Serious Illness or Life Support.**

**THIS SECTION IS TO BE COMPLETED BY A LICENSED PHYSICIAN, CERTIFIED NURSE PRACTITIONER OR PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT ONLY.**

**I hereby certify that termination of electric and/or gas service will either  
(check applicable box or boxes):**

**Aggravate an existing serious illness<sup>1</sup>**

**OR**

**Prevent the use of life support equipment by the person named above<sup>2</sup>**

**Physician, Certified Nurse Practitioner's  
or Physician Assistant's Name**

\_\_\_\_\_  
*(Please Print)*

**License No.** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Office Phone No.** \_\_\_\_\_

**Fax No.** \_\_\_\_\_

**E-mail Address** \_\_\_\_\_

**Physician, Certified Nurse Practitioner's  
or Physician Assistant's signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**PLEASE NOTE:**

**Within 30 days of submitting this certificate, you must enter into an agreement with your utility for the payment of unpaid and current bills to continue service.**

<sup>1</sup>"Serious illness" means an illness certifiable by a licensed physician to be such that termination of service during the period of time covered by the certificate would be especially dangerous to the health of the person certified to be seriously ill.

<sup>2</sup>"Life-support equipment" means any electric or gas energy-using device certified by a licensed physician as being essential to prevent, or to provide relief from, a serious illness or to sustain the life of the customer or an occupant of the premises.

**SECTION TWO:**

**Permission for utility company to release contact information in a weather-related emergency.**

**THIS SECTION TO BE COMPLETED IF YOU WANT TO GRANT YOUR UTILITY COMPANY PERMISSION TO RELEASE CONTACT INFORMATION FOR YOU IN THE EVENT OF A WEATHER-RELATED EMERGENCY<sup>3</sup>**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ grant my utility company \_\_\_\_\_  
(Print Name) (Name of Company)

my permission to provide any local, state, or federal government emergency responder agency the following contact information, in order that the agency may provide assistance to me in the event of a weather-related emergency;

**Street Address** \_\_\_\_\_

**City, State, Zip** \_\_\_\_\_

**Telephone Number** \_\_\_\_\_

**Utility Account Number** \_\_\_\_\_

**Printed Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Customer's Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>3</sup>This section, if signed, will allow your utility company to release your contact information to any local, state, or federal government emergency responder agencies. Release of this information is solely for the purpose of verifying your well-being and providing assistance to you in the event of a weather-related emergency, as possible. Submitting this form will not provide you with priority in restoration of electricity service.