

## Maryland to distribute \$83 million in relief to utility customers

By: Eric Neugeboren June 16, 2021

Some Maryland residents with overdue gas and electric payments will soon receive relief.

The Maryland Public Service Commission announced Tuesday that it has allocated \$83 million to electric and gas utilities so they can assist customers who have outstanding gas and electric arrearages

The aid is part of a pandemic relief package — the Recovery for the Economy, Livelihoods, Industries, Entrepreneurs, and Families Act — that the Maryland General Assembly passed and Gov. Larry Hogan signed earlier this year.

Residents in Maryland owe \$276 million to utility companies due in part to the job loss and loss of income brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, the commission said Tuesday. Customers who accumulated utility arrearages before June 30 will be eligible for the relief.

The \$83 million is expected to eliminate all arrearages for customers who have received state energy assistance within the past four years and customers who have demonstrated a medical need for electricity to their utility company. The rest of the money will go toward customers whose arrearages date back the longest.

Utility companies have been directed to reach out to eligible customers.

By Oct. 1, the utility companies must report to the commission how it has distributed the funds, including dollar amounts given to each customer account and reasons if any money was unspent.

David Lapp is the head of the Maryland Office of People's Counsel, an agency that represents consumer interests before the Public Service Commission and other government agencies. He said the funding can make "a fundamental difference" in helping people who have struggled to pay their utilities.

But Lapp also noted that more relief would be beneficial.

"This is a great first step, but this only meets part of the need that is out there," Lapp said.

Pepco, an electricity provider, commended the allocation of the funding in a news release Tuesday. Pepco customers who are eligible for the relief do not need to take any action and will see the grant applied to their account during one of the next two billing cycles.

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