

How to Negotiate with your Utility Provider

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 electric, gas, water and sewage services, as well as phone, cable, and internet services. The Order expired on September 1, 2020. The Public Service Commission made a ruling extending the moratorium until October 1, 2020 to prevent shut-offs and late fee collection for non-payment of electric, gas and private water. Any termination notice sent before October 1, 2020 is invalid.

The utility companies may not send a termination notice until October 1, 2020. The stated turnoff date cannot be before November 15, 2020.

If you cannot make your utility payments during the State of Emergency, OPC recommends you reach out to your utility company and try to work out a reasonable payment plan. Do not wait to talk to your utility until after the State of Emergency is over and the suspension is lifted.

- Utilities cannot shut off your service through November 15, 2020
- For those that have been certified as eligible for Office of Home Energy Programs the utility company offer a minimum repayment plan of 24 months. For those who are not income eligible for OHEP, the utility must offer a minimum repayment plan of 12 months.
- The utility can not require a down payment or security deposit for any residential customer as a condition of entering a payment plan.
- The utility can not refuse a payment plan because the customer failed to meet the terms of an alternative payment plan during the past 18 months.

If your utility denies your request, or only offers a plan that you believe is not reasonable, you have the right to file a complaint with the Consumer Assistance Division of the Public Service Commission.

How to file a complaint against your utility:

While Maryland is currently in a State of Emergency you can still make a complaint against a utility. Complaints against utility companies are made to the Public Service Commission (PSC), Community Affairs Division (PSC/CAD). The PSC regulates utilities, and CAD handles consumer complaints about utilities. You must contact the utility first to try to resolve your problem.

Office of People's Counsel
DLInfo_OPC@maryland.gov
410-767-8150; 800-207-4055 www.opc.maryland.gov

Possible examples as to why you may choose to file a complaint with PSC/CAD.

- Your lights are off and your utility company denies you a request for a required minimum 12 month payment plan
- The utility required a security deposit for a payment plan.
- You believe your bill amount is incorrect and the utility company will not investigate or claims it is the correct amount.
- You have a dispute about a utility supplier amount on your bills. You did not sign a contract with the supplier, or believe that the supplier was deceptive in its marketing. NOTE: The utility is the biller but cannot resolve this dispute. Let them know anyway, and contact the supplier about your dispute before you file the CAD complaint.
- You have had your utility shut off during the State of Emergency, although the Executive Order prohibits the shut offs.

During the State of Emergency the PSC/CAD physical office is closed and they cannot accept phone calls. There are currently 2 ways that you can file a complaint against your utility with the PSC/CAD.

- 1) File a complaint online at www.psc.state.md.us.
- 2) If you do not have access to a computer contact the OPC at 410-767-8150 to explain your situation and request that a complaint form be sent to you. Let us know if your service was shut-off after March 13. Once you fill out the PSC/CAD complaint form, you will mail it to:

Maryland Public Service Commission
6 St. Paul Street
16th Floor
Baltimore, MD 21202

When filling out the PSC/CAD complaint form OPC recommends the following:

- Before you file a complaint, make sure you have spoken with your utility.
- Be specific and include any details about documents, dates, and people.
- Have a well-documented response from the utility about your complaint. Who you spoke with, on what date, and what was said. Details matter
- Be clear about your complaint and why you are making the complaint. You are telling them why you disagree with the utility's decision.

If you are having difficulty filling out the form call the OPC at 410-767-8150 or email OPC at DLInfo_OPC@maryland.gov.