

## **COVID-19 and the State of Emergency How to Apply for Help with Your Gas or Electric 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 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 turn-off date cannot be before November 15, 2020.

### **Should you still pay their utility bills during the suspension of terminations and late fees?**

Yes! You should make every effort to stay current on all utility payments. Once the suspension is lifted, you will be responsible for all utility usage and payments. It is important for you to make payments on your monthly bill and any past-due balances – even if they are partial payments. You will still receive your utility bills each month. If you are struggling to pay your bills, you should reach out to your utility company to come up with a payment plan. All utilities must offer a 24-month payment plan to OHEP certified customers and a 12-month payment plan to non-certified customers. They cannot deny a customer a payment plan for previous broken payment arrangements in the last 18 months. There are no required security deposits or down payments necessary to enter into a payment plan.

You can still apply for state energy assistance programs. Local DSS offices are starting to open and schedule appointments to see clients. Call the local OHEP office to see if they have any walk-in hours or can schedule an appointment. See below for more instructions specific to OHEP and the Fuel Fund. Keep in mind that many smaller agencies like churches and non-profits may close their doors completely during this time, and may have additional requests for other assistance due to lay-offs or restricted work hours.

### **What if someone in my household is critically ill or relies on electricity service for life support. What can I do to get service back on?**

If someone in your home is critically ill and relies on electricity service for life support you should immediately contact your utility to discuss options. If you have a limited income and are receiving services at a hospital or medical facility, you should find out if there is a certified “Navigator” who can assist you with your utility service problem. If none is available, contact the Office of People's Counsel for more information.

### **I have trouble making payments on my utility bill. What are my options right now?**

There are energy assistance programs available to Maryland residents who face challenges paying their energy bills.

1) [Apply to the Office of Home Energy Programs \(OHEP\)](#)

Limited-income customers may be eligible for Maryland state energy assistance programs that can help with gas and electric bills. There is one application for all Maryland state energy assistance programs through OHEP.

*Who is eligible?*

Any Maryland resident who meets income guidelines is eligible to apply for energy assistance through OHEP. The electricity customer must apply for the Electric Universal Service Program (EUSP). A household member may apply for MEAP.

<b>FY 2020 OHEP ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES for MEAP and EUSP</b>		
<b>Household Size</b>	<b>Maximum Monthly Income</b>	<b>Maximum Yearly Income</b>
1	\$1,821	\$21,858
2	\$2,400	\$29,593
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
For each Additional person, add	\$645	\$7,740

*How do I apply?*

As the state responds to the COVID-19 pandemic, OHEP will continue to accept applications and process benefit payments. In order to limit person-to-person contact, there are several ways that you can apply:

- **Online:** At this time, this is the most reliable option. Apply online at [www.mydhrbenefits.dhr.state.md.us](http://www.mydhrbenefits.dhr.state.md.us)
- **Phone:** You may call your local OHEP office to request assistance completing an application over the phone. The list of local offices is here: <http://dhs.maryland.gov/office-of-home-energy-programs/>
- **Apply in Person:** Call ahead to your local OHEP office to schedule an appointment (as

available) or to see if they are taking limited walk-ins.

- **Mail-in or Drop-off:** If you do not have access to the internet call 800-332-6347 Mon-Fri, 8AM-4:30PM to request an application be mailed to you. You may continue to mail applications to your local office for processing. Some OHEP offices will have a secure lockbox to drop-off applications. Secure lockboxes are not available at all sites. You will need to provide copies of certain documents. See the list at <http://dhs.maryland.gov/office-of-home-energy-programs/>.

Processing times and payment disbursement times should not be affected by these temporary changes. To check the status of your application you can go online to [www.myohepstatus.org](http://www.myohepstatus.org).

## 2) [Apply to Fuel Fund](#)

The Fuel Fund is a charitable organization that provides financial assistance for utility bills and bulk fuel to those who are eligible.

### *Who is eligible?*

In order to be eligible you must meet the following criteria:

1. You live in the state of Maryland.
2. You have a current, completed application with the Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP). If you are a senior (60+) and have not completed your OHEP application, contact the Fuel Fund, they are waiving the requirement of having a completed OHEP application for those 60+ through 12/31/2020.
3. You meet Fuel Fund's income requirements. The Fuel Fund program is flexible. For special circumstances involving extreme hardship, you may be eligible even if your income is over the limit.
4. You have not received help from the Fuel Fund in the past 12 months.
5. A turn-off notice is not required through 12/31/2020.

Household Size	Maximum Monthly Income	Maximum Annual Income
1	\$2,082	\$24,980
2	\$2,818	\$33,820
3	\$3,555	\$42,660
4	\$4,292	\$51,500
5	\$5,028	\$60,340
6	\$5,765	\$69,180
7	\$6,502	\$78,020
8	\$7,238	\$86,860

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

*How do I apply?*

There are two ways to apply:

- **Online:** Apply online at [www.fuel Maryland.org](http://www.fuel Maryland.org)
- **Phone:** If you cannot apply online then you can call 410-235-9080 EX 1 Mon/Wed/Fri, 10AM-12PM.

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

3) Dial 2-1-1

2-1-1 is a number you can dial and speak to someone about other resources in your local community that may be able to help you pay your utility bill. 2-1-1 is available 7 days per week, 24 hours per day. You can also speak with someone at 2-1-1 about other issues you may be facing like not having enough food, COVID-19 questions, or help with other bills.

**\*\*If you have a past due water bill reach out to your provider to make a payment plan. In accordance with the Public Service Commission ruling private water companies must suspend all terminations and late fees at this time. Some water companies are restoring previously terminated households in light of this emergency situation. Contact the provider directly to discuss the specifics of your account. Please also reference the Water Information Sheet on the OPC website.**

**\*\*If your employment was affected by the emergency closures you may be eligible for Unemployment Benefits. Employees can find information and submit an online application at <https://www.dllr.state.md.us/employment/unemployment.shtml> or call 800-827-4839.**