

————— **OPC** ———

OFFICE OF PEOPLE's COUNSEL

State of Maryland

Community Resource Guide

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This guide will walk you through the steps we suggest you take to help keep your power on. If you run into any issues, do not hesitate to reach back out to our office by calling 410-767-8150.

How to Keep Your Power On

If you're having trouble paying your utility bill, there is help available. Here's what you can do:

Apply for Help: You can get financial help from the Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP). This program helps people who qualify pay their energy and fuel bills. You don't need a notice saying your service will be cut off to apply. When you fill out the OHEP application, you're asking for up to four grants and free weatherization for your home, which can help lower your monthly costs.

Who Can Get Help: To qualify, you need to meet certain income guidelines. You don't need to have a shut-off notice to apply. You can get help from OHEP once each year (from July 1 to June 30).

Income Guidelines: These are based on how much money everyone in your household, 18 years or older, makes. This includes all benefits and earned income. If someone in your home has no income, they need to fill out a special form. The guidelines are based on your total income before taxes are taken out. These guidelines don't consider other bills or expenses you might have.

Income-Eligibility Limits for Energy Assistance Help	
Number of people in the home	Gross income for the last 30 days
1	\$2,510
2	\$3,406
3	\$4,303
4	\$5,200
5	\$6,096
6	\$6,993
7	\$7,890
8	\$8,786
9	\$9,683
10	\$10,580
11+	Add \$897 for each additional person

How to Apply for OHEP

You can apply to OHEP in five different ways:

1. **Online:** Go to [this website](https://mymdthink.maryland.gov) and create an account. After you sign up, you can submit your application. Make sure to attach all required documents when you apply online. <https://mymdthink.maryland.gov>
2. **In Person:** Call your local OHEP office to check their hours and if you need an appointment. Bring all the required documents with you.
3. **Mail:** Send your completed application and copies of all required documents to your local OHEP office. Remember to keep a copy of everything you send.
4. **Email:** Email your completed application and required documents to your local OHEP office.
5. **Drop Boxes:** Drop off your completed application and documents into a secure drop box at your local OHEP office. Again, keep copies of everything for yourself before you drop it off.

For a list of OHEP locations and contact information, visit their website: [OHEP Locations](https://dhs.maryland.gov/office-of-home-energy-programs/local-home-energy-program-office/).
<https://dhs.maryland.gov/office-of-home-energy-programs/local-home-energy-program-office/>

Important: Make sure to include all required documents. If any documents are missing, your application might be delayed or denied.

List of documents you need to apply to OHEP

A complete OHEP application includes all the following-NO EXCEPTIONS. When submitting documents, make sure the person's name, the amount, the source, and the date are visible.

- Completed and signed OHEP application.
- Copy of your most recent utility bill.
- Copy of the ID of the person whose name is on the OHEP application.
- Copy of social security cards for everyone listed in the household.
- Proof of income for all household members listed on the application over the age of 18.
- Any other forms that apply to your application. There is a list of forms on the OHEP website: <https://dhs.maryland.gov/office-of-home-energy-programs/>. If you do not have access to the internet, contact your local OHEP office for further assistance.

If you do not have some of these documents, there may be others you can use.
Check out the list of substitutions on the OHEP website.

Choosing which grants to apply for on the OHEP application

When you fill out your OHEP application, you'll see options to apply for different grants. Here's how to choose the right ones:

1. **Check All That Apply:** Make sure to check the boxes for all the grants you might be eligible for. OHEP will only look at the grants for which you check the boxes.
2. **Section 5 (Top of Page 3):** Check this box if you want OHEP to screen you for all available grants. If you check this box, you still need to fill in your utility's name and account number in Sections 6 and 7.
3. **Section 6 - Electric Assistance Grant (EUSP):** This grant helps with your electricity bills. If you only want help with electric bills, check this box. If you checked Section 5 for all grants, you don't need to check this box separately, but you must still provide your electric company's name and your account number.
4. **Section 7 - Heating Assistance Grant (MEAP):** This grant helps with the cost of heating your home. If you only want help with heating, check this box. If you checked Section 5 for all grants, you don't need to check this box separately, but you must still provide your heating company's name and your account number.
5. **Section 8 - Energy Efficiency:** Check this box if you want free improvements to make your home more energy-efficient. This can include things like adding insulation or fixing drafts, which can lower your energy bills. If you check this box, a contractor will contact you to set up an appointment.
6. **Section 9 - Prevent Shut-Off with Regular Payment (USPP):** This program helps if you are in the Maryland Energy Assistance Program (MEAP). Benefits include reconnecting service if you owe less than \$400 and applying MEAP benefits to past bills.

If you're not sure which boxes to check, start by checking Section 5 to be considered for all grants. Just remember to provide all required information about your utility companies.

I have not heard back from Office of Home Energy Programs

To check the status of your OHEP application, follow these steps:

1. **Visit the Website:** Go to www.myohepstatus.org.

2. **Log In:** Enter the last name of the person who applied, the last 4 digits of their Social Security number, and their date of birth.
3. **Check Your Status:** The website will show you where your application is in the process. You can see if you've been awarded grants or if there's a problem with your application.
4. **If No Update:** If you don't see an update, call or email your local OHEP office to ask for a status update. It's okay to call or email several times if needed.
5. **Watch for Communications:** Keep an eye on your mail, email, and voicemail. OHEP will try to reach you if there are any issues with your application.

Video for assistance

If you have access to the internet, there is a toolkit online with more information including instructional videos. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-dbDkEzg80>

Medical Certification Form

If you or someone in your home has a serious medical condition or uses life support equipment, you might be able to get special protection for your utility service. Here's what you need to know:

1. **What Is It?**: The Public Service Commission Medical Certification Form helps protect your utility service if stopping it would make a serious illness worse or prevent you from using important medical equipment.
2. **Who Signs It?**: A doctor, nurse practitioner, or physician's assistant must fill out and sign this form.
3. **How to Use It**: Send the signed form to your utility company to keep on file.

Make sure to get this form completed and sent to your utility company as soon as possible to ensure you have the protection you need. The key is that the utility must know about the medical illness before any service termination. Watch this video for more information on the medical certification: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wA8HU9k5sgo>

Benefits of a Medical Certification Form

There are benefits to having a Medical Certification Form on file with your utility.

- If you have a pending shut-off notice, it will pause the termination for 30 days if you enter into a payment agreement during those 30 days.
- Verifying your well-being and providing assistance to you in the event of a weather-related emergency, as possible. However, submitting this form will not provide you with priority in restoration of electricity service.
- There are extra protections in terms of terminations, especially during the winter months.

If you or someone in your home is medically vulnerable you may consider sending this completed form over to your utility company.

Steps to get a Medical Certification Form on file with your utility

- 1) Call your utility and tell them that there is a medical issue in the home and that you are working on getting a Medical Certification Form filled out by your healthcare provider.
- 2) Get the form signed by your physician, nurse practitioner, or physician's assistant.
- 3) Make at least 3 copies. One for yourself, one for your utility, and one for OHEP.
- 4) Call your utility company and tell them that you want to send them a completed Medical Certification Form. Ask them where to send the form. Watch this video for more information on the medical certification: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wA8HU9k5sgo>

- 5) After you send the utility the completed form, call to confirm with your utility that they have it on file.

Free programs to help lower your monthly energy bill

Fixing and improving your home can save energy, make your home more comfortable, lower your power bills, and help with air quality and health. The Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) has programs that **might** help with things like:

- Insulation
- Hot water system improvements
- Heating and cooling repairs or replacements
- Renewable energy systems
- Other health and safety upgrades

How to Apply:

1. Turn in an energy assistance application at the Office of Home Energy Programs or a DHCD application.
2. You will be checked for eligibility for all the programs mentioned.
3. If you don't qualify for these programs, contact your utility company and ask for a free home energy audit.

Check to see if you qualify for these programs to get the help you need!

For questions or help with the application: Call 1-855-583-8976. Learn more about these programs on their website: <https://dhcd.maryland.gov/Pages/EnergyEfficiency/default.aspx>

EmPOWER MD Limited Income Energy Efficiency Program

Once it's decided that you qualify, the local agency will set up a visit to your home. If your home is in good shape, the program might make some changes to help make it safer, healthier, and save energy. Here are some examples:

- Insulation in the attic, floors, and walls
- Hot water system improvements
- Lighting retrofits
- Furnace cleaning, tuning, and safety repairs
- Refrigerator retrofit, if applicable

- Health and safety items

Eligibility:

- Must be a customer at one of the following utility companies: BGE, Delmarva Power, Potomac Edison, Pepco, SMECO, or Washington Gas.
- Must meet the income guidelines below OR you participate in another eligible program. Find the list of programs on the DHCD website: <https://dhcd.maryland.gov/Residents/Pages/lieep/default.aspx>

Maximum Annual Household Income	
Persons in family/household	Max Annual Gross Income
1	\$68,500
2	\$78,250
3	\$88,050
4	\$97,800
5	\$105,650
6	\$113,450
7	\$121,300
8	\$129,100
For families/households with more than 8 persons, for each additional person add:	\$13,450

Weatherization Assistance Program

Once it's decided that you qualify, the local agency will set up a visit to your home. If your home is in good shape, the program might make some changes to help make it safer, healthier, and save energy. Here are some examples:

- Door air infiltration reduction
- Insulation in the attic, floors, walls
- Hot water system improvements
- Lighting retrofit

- Furnace clean/tune, safety repairs, burner retrofit or replacement
- Health and safety items

Eligibility:

- Homeowner: Homeowner applicants must be income eligible and able to prove ownership of the housing unit.
- Renter: For rental units, landlords must prove ownership and also agree to participate. Tenants of rental units must be income eligible.
- Priority is given to eligible applicants who are 60+, have a disability, those who have children in the home, and those who have the highest energy consumption.
- Must meet income guidelines below OR you participate in another eligible program. Find the list of programs on the DHCD website:
<https://dhcd.maryland.gov/Residents/Pages/lieep/default.aspx>

Maximum Annual Household Income	
Persons in family/household	Max Annual Gross Income
1	\$42,570
2	\$55,669
3	\$68,767
4	\$81,866
5	\$94,964
6	\$108,063
7	\$110,519
8	\$112,975
For families/households with more than 8 persons, for each additional person add:	\$10,760

Maryland Energy Assistance Program

Once it's decided that you qualify, the local agency will set up a visit to your home. If your home is in good shape, the program might make some changes to help make it safer, healthier, and save energy. Here are some examples:

- Replacing or repairing heating/cooling/water heater systems

Eligibility:

- Have a non-functioning heating, cooling, and/or water heating system.
- Must meet income guidelines below OR you participate in another eligible program. Find the list of programs on the DHCD website:
<https://dhcd.maryland.gov/Residents/Pages/liep/default.aspx>

Maximum Annual Household Income	
Persons in family/household	Gross income for last 30 days
1	\$2,510
2	\$3,406
3	\$4,303
4	\$5,200
5	\$6,096
6	\$6,993
7	\$7,890
8	\$8,786
For families/households with more than 8 persons, for each additional person add:	\$205

How to apply for these programs: Turn in an energy assistance application at the Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP) or avDHCD application. You will be screened for all three programs.

For questions or help with the application: Call 1-855-583-8976.

Contact your utility

If you are struggling to pay your utility bills, reach out to your utility company and ask about payment plans and other special programs.

Negotiate with your utility

If you are behind on your utility bills, immediately contact your utility.

Things to consider talking to your utility about:

- Request a payment plan.
- Tell the utility if you have applied to OHEP.
- Explain why you may be behind and your plan to catch up.
- Inform the utility if there are any medical issues in the home.
- Inform the utility if there are any virtual learners in the home.

First talk with the service representative. If you are not having any luck, request to speak with a supervisor. 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 local 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 before PSC/CAD will take your complaint.

Examples of complaints:

- You think your bill is wrong, but the utility will not look into it.
- You have a problem with the utility supplier. For example, you did not sign a contract with the supplier. Or the supplier lied to get you to sign up.
- You think there is something wrong with your meter.
- You think the utility is doing something unfair or dishonest.

To file a complaint, you have four options

- 1) File a complaint online at
<https://mdpsc.force.com/complaints/>
- 2) Download a PSC/CAD complaint form at <https://www.psc.state.md.us> and mail it with any evidence.

Maryland Public Service Commission
Consumer Affairs Division
6 St. Paul Street, 15th Floor Baltimore, MD
21202

- 3) If you do not have a computer or access to one, call PSC/CAD at 410- 767-8000 or 1-800-492-0474 and ask them to mail you a complaint form. Inform the PSC/CAD representative if you have a shut-off notice or are off-service and ask them to take a complaint by phone. A form will be mailed to you to fill out and return.
- 4) You can fax a written complaint with any supporting documents to 410-333-6844.

Tips when filing a complaint

- Speak with your utility before you file a complaint.
- Be clear about the problem and why you are making the complaint. Why do you disagree with the utility's decision? What do you want to happen?
- List out what you have already done to solve the problem. Be specific. Include details about documents, dates, and people.
- Have a lot of details about how the utility has responded about your complaint: who you spoke with, on what date, and what was said. Details matter.

While CAD looks into your complaint, a utility cannot cut off service for a bill or part of a bill that is in the complaint. However, you do still have to pay bills that are not part of the complaint. You are entitled to a written decision about the complaint. You also have the right to appeal the decision by PSC/CAD. If at the end of the complaint process, you do not agree with the final decision, you have 30 days to file with the Circuit Court against the decision.

If you run into problems, call the OPC at 410-767-8150 or email OPC at OPC@maryland.gov.

Other sources to help pay your utility bill

If you are denied from OHEP or need more funding to cover the costs of your utility bill, there may be other options.

Fuel Fund

Fuel Fund of Maryland is a private non-profit that may be able to help pay your gas/electric/bulk fuel costs once you have applied to OHEP. You can only utilize this assistance once every 12 months. Fuel Fund serves the following needs/areas.

- Gas/electric/bulk fuel for BGE customers
- Bulk fuel for the entire state during winter months

You can apply for the Fuel Fund Mon, Wed, Fri, 9AM-1PM

- 1) Call them at 410-235-9080
- 2) Apply online at www.fuelfundmaryland.org

211MD

211MD is a 24/7/365 helpline that provides information and referrals to other financial assistance resources in your area. You can contact them in three ways:

- 1) Dial 2-1-1 or 800-685-0185
- 2) Search for resources online at www.211md.org
- 3) Email them at info@211md.org

MAP

MAP is the gateway to long-term services and supports in Maryland. MAP specialists work with caregivers, professionals, and all individuals with long-term care needs to plan, identify, connect, and assist with accessing private and public resources for long-term services and supports. 1-844-MAP-LINK (1-844-627-5465)

MD Commitment to Veterans

Regional Resource Coordinators assist Maryland residents who have served or are currently serving in the US Armed Services (Active duty, Guard or Reserve) and their families, with access to mental health and substance-use services. They also

provide referral services, peer support, and crisis funding. Call 24/7/365 to 1-877-770-4801.

Assistance with your telephone bill

Lifeline is a federal program that helps limited-income consumers pay for their telephone and internet services by providing a monthly discount. The cost of the program is shared by all telephone customers. In Maryland, the program is called Tel-Life.

You can apply Lifeline assistance to one of these options:

- Existing voice-fixed (home phone)
- Existing voice-mobile (cell phone)
- Standalone broadband internet (mobile or fixed)
- Existing or new bundles of voice (fixed or mobile) and broadband internet

Lifeline service providers must meet the following minimum standards:

- Mobile phone: At least 1000 minutes per month provided
- Mobile internet: Speed of 3G or better and usage of at least 4.5G per month provided
- Home internet: Speed of 25/3Mbps and usage of at least 1080GB per month provided
- Bundled services: At least one of the services (voice or internet) must meet the minimum standards for that service

Eligibility

You are eligible for Lifeline if you or your dependent meet one of the below criteria:

- Earn 135% or less of the federal poverty limit

OR

- Participate in one of these programs:
 - Food Supplemental Program (SNAP)
 - Medicaid
 - Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

- Federal Public Housing Assistance (FPHA)
- Veterans Pension or Survivors Pension
- Certain Tribal Programs

How and where to apply

You will sign up through the company directly. Many companies advertise their Lifeline services, or you may find a list at www.lifelinesupport.org. When

you sign up for Lifeline, you will need to provide the following information:

- Full legal name
- Date of birth
- Last four digits of Social Security number
- Address

You will also need to provide one of the following to verify identity:

- Valid ID
- Social Security card
- Medicaid card
- Prior year's tax return
- Other proof of identity or address

Proof of income:

- Proof of annual gross income
- Proof of program participation (SNAP, Medicaid, etc.)

How to make a complaint against a Lifeline provider

First, you should contact the provider to try and resolve the problem. If you are not satisfied, there are other agencies you can contact.

Office of the Attorney General of Maryland

Consumer Protection Division

200 St. Paul Place

Baltimore, MD 21202

410-528-8662: Consumer Mediation Unit Hotline

Email: consumer@oag.state.md.us

If you have a complaint about deceptive or misleading advertising or contracts, or you have a complaint about a wireless or broadband provider, contact the Office of the Attorney General.

Maryland Public Service Commission

Office of External Relations
6 St. Paul Street, 16th Floor
Baltimore, MD 21202
410-767-8028

File a complaint online: <https://mdpsc.force.com/complaints/>

The Maryland Public Service Commission certifies Lifeline providers and has regulatory authority over landline voice providers. It does not have regulatory authority over wireless or broadband providers.

Universal Service Administrative Company

www.usac.org
For general information on the Lifeline program.

Frequently asked questions

What is Budget Billing?

Budget billing helps spread your utility costs evenly over the year. Even though you pay a similar amount each month, your utility company will check and adjust your payments at least twice a year based on your actual usage. This means your bill might go up or down if you use more or less energy.

Why did I suddenly receive a high bill?

If you get a bill that's much higher than usual, here are some reasons why:

- **Old Charges:** A bill from a previous home might have been added to your current bill. Call your utility to check if this is the case. If you need help, contact our office.
- **Home Issues:** Your furnace or appliances might not be working well, or your home might not be properly weatherized. There are programs to help with these issues. Check the weatherization section in this packet for options.

- **Retail Supplier:** You might be paying more because of a retail supplier. Compare their rates with your local utility company.
- **Estimated Reading:** Your bill might be based on estimated readings instead of actual usage. Request a meter reading from your utility for a possible adjustment.
- **Meter Problems:** If you think your meter is not working right, ask your utility for a meter test. If you're not happy with the results, you can request a referee test from the Public Service Commission for a small fee.

Can I change my utility bill due date?

Yes, you can use the Bill Extender Plan to choose a payment date that matches when you get your check. This can help you avoid late fees. If you're on Social Security or other government assistance, consider signing up for this plan. Call your utility company to ask about the Bill Extender Plan.