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**Utility customers to receive \$83 million
in much-needed energy assistance**

(June 15, 2021) — Many Maryland utility customers who have been struggling with debt through the COVID-19 pandemic should soon feel some relief.

Today, the Maryland Public Service Commission ordered the distribution of \$83 million in energy-assistance funds to residential customers' bill arrearages, as required by the recently enacted Recovery for the Economy, Livelihoods, Industries, Entrepreneurs, and Families Act (RELIEF Act). The Office of People's Counsel applauds the Maryland General Assembly and the Commission for moving to secure valuable assistance for Maryland's residential customers, many of whom have suffered economically because of the pandemic.

OPC has been active in advocating for struggling residential customers since the pandemic began. The office recently offered recommendations to the Commission as to how the RELIEF Act funds should be allocated, and the Commission's order agrees with many of OPC's recommendations.

The RELIEF Act requires the Commission to distribute money as grants to utility companies to assist households with utility arrearages by reducing those arrearages in the following order:

- Category 1: To eliminate all arrearages for households who have qualified for Office of Home Energy Programs Energy Assistance benefits in the past four years;
- Category 2: To eliminate all arrearages for residential special needs customers; and
- Category 3: To eliminate the oldest arrearages.

The PSC agreed with OPC’s recommendations to allocate funds to fully pay off Categories 1 and 2 before applying funds to Category 3. The PSC also adopted several of OPC’s suggested RELIEF Act reporting and communications requirements for utilities. These measures will allow the Commission to ensure that Marylanders in need continue to receive help and will keep customers informed as to available assistance.

“We applaud the work of the General Assembly and the Commission recognizing the plight of consumers facing utility arrearages during these difficult times,” said People’s Counsel David S. Lapp. “Eliminating and reducing consumer arrearages will provide critical relief to many consumers. We urge the utilities to act expeditiously to apply the funds to customer accounts.”

The Maryland Office of People’s Counsel is an independent state agency that represents Maryland’s residential consumers of electric, natural gas, telecommunications, private water and certain transportation matters before the Public Service Commission, federal regulatory agencies, and the courts.

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