

Maryland Office of People's Counsel (OPC)

## **IMPORTANT ALERT**

### ***Moratorium on Utility Shut-Offs, Bill Assistance And Deferred Payment Plans***

**Protect yourself. Contact your utility NOW for a payment plan.**

**You may be eligible for energy assistance – APPLY NOW.**

**Questions? Contact OPC at 410-767-8150 or [DLInfo\\_OPC@maryland.gov](mailto:DLInfo_OPC@maryland.gov).**

### **Moratorium Status**

1. The Public Service Commission (PSC) has issued a moratorium on shut-offs of gas, electricity, telephone (landline only), and private water companies.
  - a. Customers cannot be turned off prior to November 15, 2020.
  - b. Utilities can begin to send turn-off notices on October 1, 2020. This gives you 45 days to address past-due utility bills.
  - c. Any shut-off notice sent prior to October 1, 2020 is void.
  
2. The Governor's Executive Order prohibiting shut-offs of utility services and other residential services has expired.
  - a. The PSC order is the only order prohibiting shut-offs of residential utility services.
  - b. There is no moratorium on shut-offs of cellphone, VOIP, broadband, or internet services.

### **Past-Due Bills – Steps to Take**

1. **Apply for energy assistance now.** If you are on a fixed income, unemployed or underemployed, or paid low wages, these funds can be a lifeline. See instruction below.
  
2. **Contact your utility now.** The utility **MUST** offer you a payment plan of at least 12 months with no down payment. See instructions below.

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*410-767-8150; 800-207-4055*

[www.opc.maryland.gov](http://www.opc.maryland.gov)

*September 2, 2020*

## Energy Assistance

1. **There are energy assistance funds available.** As ratepayers and taxpayers, we pay for these funds. **You do not need a turn-off notice to apply.**
2. **Remember: The funds can help with past-due bills and reduce current bills.**
3. **Apply to the Office of Home Energy Program (OHEP) ASAP**
  - a. **Online:** <https://mydhrbenefits.dhr.state.md.us/>
  - b. **Mail:** Contact your local energy assistance office to be mailed an application. If you are unsure of your local energy assistance office call 800-332-6347.
  - c. **Call:** Contact your local energy assistance office or 800-332-6347 for an application or to ask questions.
  - d. **Walk-in or Schedule an appointment:** Some local energy assistance offices are seeing clients. Contact your local energy assistance office to find out how they are operating.
  - e. **Information:** <https://dhs.maryland.gov/office-of-home-energy-programs>
4. **Not eligible for OHEP? A little over-income?**
  - a. Fuel Fund (Central Maryland):
    - i. Apply online at [www.fuefundmaryland.org](http://www.fuefundmaryland.org)
    - ii. Call 410-235-9080 and press option 1
  - b. Washington Area Fuel Fund: Contact your local Salvation Army
    - i. Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's: 301-638-9532
    - ii. Frederick: 301-662-2311
    - iii. Montgomery: 301-515-5354
    - iv. Prince George's: 301-277-6103
  - c. Check out our Resource Guides at [www.opc.maryland.gov](http://www.opc.maryland.gov).
5. **Eligibility: Maximum monthly income**
  - a. **1-person household:** \$1,861
  - b. **3-Person household:** \$3,168

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6. **Unemployment:** The extra \$600 per week in Unemployment Benefits will not be counted as income.
7. **Average FY20 OHEP grants:**
  - a. Bill assistance: \$467
  - b. Electric past-due bills: \$862
  - c. Gas past-due bills: \$607
8. **Check out our resources** at [www.opc.maryland.gov](http://www.opc.maryland.gov).

## **Utility Payment Plans (PSC Temporary Rules) – Past-Due Bills**

1. Every electric, gas, landline (phone), and private water utility must comply with these rules.
2. **Take action now** to make sure you are protected from utility-shut-offs on November 15 or later.
3. **Contact your utility ASAP.** Tell them you want a payment plan. If you have applied for OHEP assistance, tell them. See rules below.

## **Temporary Payment Plan Rules**

1. Utilities must offer everyone a **minimum 12-month payment plan.**
  - a. If they do not offer you one up-front, tell them you want one.
  - b. If you have a high past-due bill, and you need a longer plan, give them information: household income; applications for energy assistance; special circumstances such as serious medical conditions, reliance on electricity for medical equipment, telehealth and distance learning
2. OHEP-Certified Customers: **Minimum 24-month payment plan.**
3. **Downpayments:** Utilities cannot require them as part of plan.
4. **Security Deposits:** Utilities cannot require them as part of plan.

5. **Did you fall behind on a prior payment plan during the past 18 months?** The utility cannot deny you this plan because you fell behind or defaulted on a prior plan.