

Protections for Responsible Utility Customers

The Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (PUC) promotes and ensures policy protections for responsible bill-paying utility customers from rate increases resulting from attributable payment delinquencies of other customers. The protections provide public utilities with collection guidelines and procedures that promote timely collections, while ensuring that utility service remains available to all customers on reasonable terms and conditions. These protections and policies are applicable to electric distribution, water distribution, natural gas distribution, steam heat and wastewater utilities.

UTILITY COMPANY RESPONSIBILITY:

Before your utility service is disconnected the utility company will:

- Send you a 10-Day Notice.
- Attempt contact with you **AT LEAST** three days prior to disconnection of service date.

The utility has three ways to attempt contact prior to terminating service:

- Make two attempts to reach the customer by phone.
- Make one attempt to visit the customer at home.
- Contact the customer by text, email or other electronic messaging — only if the customer has agreed.

Note: A termination notice is valid for 60 days. Termination of service can occur any time between Day 11 and Day 60 after issuing the notice.

CONSUMER RESPONSIBILITY:

Your utility company CAN shut off your service if you fail to:

- Pay your bill.
- Follow the terms of your payment arrangements.
- Make a required deposit.
- Allow the utility company to access its equipment.

Your utility service CAN be terminated during the winter months without PUC approval if:

- You fail to be a responsible utility customer.
- Your income is outside the utility company's income qualifying guidelines.

The utility company will give you the opportunity to make payment arrangements to avoid termination.

Your utility company WILL NOT disconnect your service if:	Your utility company WILL disconnect your service WITHOUT giving you notice if you:
■ You or anyone in the household is seriously ill.	■ Steal utility services.
■ A physician provides documentation that terminating utility service will harm a person who is ill. Initial Medical Certification can last up to 30 days, with extension of up to an additional 60 days. It is important that you continue to pay your bill during the medical certificate period.	■ Turn on service fraudulently.
	■ Tamper with the equipment or cause unsafe conditions.
	■ Utilize a bad check or illegal forms of payment.

Winter Moratorium protects consumers from utility termination between December 1 and March 31. It should be noted that:

- During this time, the utility company will restore your service within 24 hours after you pay your bill and meet the utility company's conditions. *Between December 1 and March 31, a utility has seven days to restore your service when street or sidewalk digging is required.*
- When termination occurs during the rest of the year, your service will be restored within three to seven days if you pay your bill and meet the utility company's conditions.

2024 Income Guidelines

Size of Household	150% of Poverty	250% of Poverty
1	\$1,882	\$3,137
2	\$2,555	\$4,258
3	\$3,227	\$5,379
4	\$3,900	\$6,500
For each additional person, add	\$672	\$1,120

Note: Monthly Federal Poverty Income Guidelines are updated every January.

To obtain new service or reconnect service - or if you break a payment arrangement - the PUC may establish payment arrangements utilizing the amounts based on income-qualifying guidelines.

Payment Arrangements

- The utility must offer one payment arrangement and may be required to offer another payment arrangement, based on the circumstances.
- The utility company may voluntarily offer more than one payment arrangement.
- The PUC may be able to establish one payment arrangement.

If you break payment arrangements established with the PUC, the PUC cannot help you unless your income significantly changes and/or special circumstances include:

- Onset of chronic illness that results in significant loss of income.
- Catastrophic damage or loss to your residence that resulted in significant cost to customer.
- Increased number of household dependents.

Your utility company may also require proof of income.

You may be required to pay a deposit if:

- You have bad credit history or no payment credit history.
- Service was terminated for unpaid bills.
- You missed paying your bill two consecutive payments or three payments over a 12-month period.

The amount of the deposit may vary and could be an average of two monthly bills.

If you have broken two or more prior arrangements the utility company may require you to pay the full balance owed on the bill. You may not be required to pay a deposit if you are income qualifying for a Customer Assistance Program.

Medical Certification:

Utility service will not be disconnected if you or anyone in your household is certified as seriously ill by a licensed health care provider.

Your utility company will require a letter from a licensed physician, physician's assistant or nurse practitioner stating that disconnection of utility service will harm the person that is ill residing in the home. The initial certification can last up to 30 days with additional renewals possible.

It is important to know that you are responsible to pay your bill even when there is a medical certificate on file for the person in the household.

Your utility company will assist you and explain Customer Assistance Programs (CAPs) you may qualify for if:

- Your outstanding balance includes charges owed from participation in the CAP.
- You are eligible for CAP, the payment may be the lowest payment amount a utility can set.

Current PUC policy does not allow the PUC to establish a payment arrangement on CAP arrears.

Third Party Notification provides additional protections against utility termination, including the following circumstances if you:

- Are away from the home for a long period of time.
- Do not understand the utility guidelines.
- Designate a third party to receive copies of late payment and or termination notices, which can be a neighbor, a close friend or family member.

The Third Party **IS NOT** responsible for the utility bill or payment. Contact your utility company for more information.

It Is Important That You Contact Your Utility FIRST:

- If you want to file a complaint and/or attempt to make payment arrangements. If there is no resolution, you have the right to decline the payment arrangements and file a complaint with the PUC.
- If you have a loss of income or loss of hours at work, please contact the utility company to see if you qualify for customer assistance programs offered.
- If you have a Protection from Abuse (PFA) court order, please contact your utility company for special protection information.



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For people with speech or hearing loss, dial 7-1-1 (Telecommunications Relay Service)

Visit our website: www.puc.pa.gov

Contact our consumer educators at: ConsumerEd@pa.gov



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