

In the Matter of Arrearage, Collection and  
Termination Practices of Maryland Electric, Gas, or  
Electric and Gas Utilities  
PSC Case No. 9175  
March 4, 2009 Hearing

Maryland Office of People's Counsel

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## ■ What We Do

- Legal Advocacy
  - Regulatory Cases (PSC, FERC, FCC, Courts)
  - Rulemakings (PSC, FERC, FCC)
  - Public Conferences
  - Legislation
  
- Consumer Assistance
  - Investigations, inquiries and referrals
  - Assistance – “Case Management” (terminations; vulnerable customers)
  
- Information and resources
  - Brochures
  - Agency inquiries
  - Resource Guides
  - Agency Training

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## ■ High Bill Complaints

### ■ Possible explanations

- Rate changes
- Colder than normal winter
- Longer billing cycle
- Estimated bills
- Meter malfunctions
- Other charges on bill
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- Explanations may apply to some but not all customers

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## **Arrears and Payment Troubled Customers**

- Issues need to be addressed in Phases
  - Immediate Action (Post-Winter Restriction)
  - High Bill Complaints – Further Investigation
  - Comprehensive Proceeding or Rulemaking

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■ **Immediate action – NOW**

- Investigate high bill complaints
- Low-income
  - Energy Assistance Outreach
  - Extension of hold (beyond 55 days) for EA applicants
  - Reasonable alternate payment plans (APPs) for all
  - Dispute resolution available to all – utility and PSC
  - Reconnections
- Non low-income
  - One size may not fit all
  - Reasonable alternate payment plans
    - High bill complaints (for undisputed amounts)
    - Customers with existing arrears
    - Customers who state trouble paying current bill
  - Dispute resolutions available to all – utility and PSC

## ■ High Bill Complaints

- Need to continue evaluation – WG or Report
  - Technical Staff
  - PSC OER
  - Utilities
  - Other stakeholders
- Data and assessment can assist with recommendations for regulation, policy and practice changes

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- Comprehensive Rulemaking or Proceeding
    - Deposits – Credit
    - Customer Information
    - Terminations
    - Termination Restrictions
    - Alternate Payment Plans
    - USPP
    - Budget Billing (Even Monthly Payment Plans)
    - Reconnections

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- Arrears and Payment Troubled Customers
    - Long-Term: Integration of issues
      - Distribution Rate Cases
      - Procurement of Supply
      - Energy efficiency, conservation, demand response and weatherization