

Important Information from the Office of People's Counsel PSC Dkt PC53: Utility Treatment of Past-Due Utility Bills

The Governor's moratorium on utility terminations for non-payment is set to expire September 1. We do not know if the moratorium will be extended, but it is important to plan ahead. The Public Service Commission (PSC) currently is asking for feedback from stakeholders on what regulatory actions you think should be taken to address the past-due bills and maintain utility service. This call for information is called PC53 (see attached). It is important for the PSC to hear from you. If the PSC does not direct the Utilities to follow special guidelines on how to address payment troubles, the Utilities themselves will decide. If you work with clients or community members who have been affected by the pandemic and loss of household income, resulting in past-due utility bills, share that information with the PSC.

Your voice is important right now.

The Office of People's Counsel (OPC) submitted a [Petition](#) to the PSC with our recommendations. I have summarized just some of our recommendations below. For a full list of OPC's recommendations check out the [Petition](#).

- Provide at least a 60-day Transition Grace Period following the end of the Moratorium (defined as 30 days after the end of the State of Emergency).
- Reconnect any residential customer who requests a reconnect during the Moratorium or during the Transition Grace Period.
- Waive all reconnection fees during the Moratorium and Transition Grace Period for all customers, and for four months thereafter for customers who qualify for OHEP or Fuel Fund energy assistance and for those customers who verbally express financial hardship.
- Offer Deferred Payment Arrangements (DPA) instead of the normal Alternative Payment Plans during the Moratorium Period, Transition Grace Period, and for a period of four months thereafter. Customers with no financial hardship are to be eligible for DPAs up to 18 months in length with a down payment not to exceed 10%, while customers expressing financial hardship are eligible for up to 24 months in length with 0% down payment.
- Waive new security deposit requirements associated with late payments, non-payments, arrearages, or credit-related issues for new or existing customers during the Moratorium and Transition Grace Period.

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The more information on how the pandemic has effected households and the importance of maintaining gas and electric service, the better. You must file by August 21, 2020 – but you can submit comments any time before that date. Reference PC53 in the subject of your comment.

If you are interested in making a comment here are some tips:

- Talk about what your agency does and who your clients are-who do you serve?
- In terms of utilities during COVID, what are you seeing? Are your clients struggling to pay? Have your clients lost employment? Has the moratorium helped?
- If you agree with some of OPC's suggestions, reference those suggestions specifically ([check out the Petition](#)) and talk about why OPC's recommendations would be important for your clients. If you have other recommendations, state them. How would the recommendations impact your clients?
- What would happen to your clients if no extra protections were put into place as it relates to utilities?
- If you have any client stories around this topic, SHARE (respecting client confidentiality of course). As we know, stories are really powerful.

Make your voice heard.

You must file by 5PM on August 21, 2020. Reference PC53 in the subject of your comment.

To submit your comments, you should [E-File your comments online](#) (strongly preferred). The link is at “File a Public Comment” under “Feature Topics” on the right side of the Home Page at www.psc.state.md.us. If you e-file you will need to briefly set up a login for yourself. We suggest you set this up in advance of the 5PM deadline.

If you have questions about or difficulties with the filing requirements, contact OPC at DLInfo OPC@maryland.gov no later than August 18, 2020.

The Commission will conduct a virtual legislative-style hearing on August 27 and 28 at 10AM to review the Utilities' responses to the Commission's questions and comments received from interested parties. If you would like to actively participate in the hearing, and present live comments, you must contact Molly Knoll at mollyg.knoll@maryland.gov by August 24 at 12PM. If you would like to watch the live stream of the hearing you can visit the [Public Service Commission's YouTube Channel](#).

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