



## Consumer Alert

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### **Utility Shut-Off Notices Begin Again: What To Do if You Receive One**

As of October 1, 2020, utility companies in Maryland may once again started sending utility shut-off notices to consumers. However, the Maryland Public Service Commission (PSC) has prohibited residential utility shut-offs, including gas, water, and electric services, from occurring until at least November 15, 2020. The 45-day window between a utility shut-off notice and the date that the shut-off can occur provides consumers the time to apply for financial assistance or work out a payment plan with the utility.

**If you are behind in utility payments and received a utility shut-off notice, there are actions you can take to help avoid having your service disconnected.** Immediately upon receipt of a shut-off notice, contact the utility to ask about extended payments plans, budget billing, or other measures to avoid service termination.

You may also apply for emergency assistance to pay the utility bills that are overdue. Information on energy assistance programs is available from these resources:

- Maryland PSC website (<https://www.psc.state.md.us/wp-content/uploads/Need-Helpwith-Paying-your-Bill-or-Have-a-Termination-Notice-1-2-19-revisions.pdf>)
- Office of Home Energy Programs in the Maryland Department of Human Services (<https://dhs.maryland.gov/office-of-home-energy-programs/>) or call 1 (800) 332-6347
- Fuel Fund of Maryland (<https://fuelfundmaryland.org>) or call (410) 235-9080
- Maryland 211 (<https://211md.org/211provider-utility-assistance>), call 2-1-1 or text My211MD to 898-211
- Maryland Office of People's Counsel (<http://www.opc.maryland.gov/Consumer-Corner>)

If you work out a payment plan with the utility or find financial assistance to pay off your past-due bills, the PSC has ordered that your service will not be disconnected. Any payment plan you work out with a company regulated by the PSC is required to be, at minimum, a 12-month repayment plan. Furthermore, these utilities may not collect a down payment or deposit as a requirement of that repayment plan.

Please note that not all utilities are subject to the PSC's order, including some telecom providers (such as wireless telephone companies) as well as some water and sewer agencies. If you received a shut-off notice from a utility that is not regulated by the PSC, contact that utility immediately to see if they will work out a payment plan to avoid disconnecting your service.

Do NOT wait to reach out for help if you receive a shut-off notice. If you don't take any action to help avoid a termination, the utility may disconnect your service 45 days after they have given you notice.