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PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION

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Press Releases

PUC Urges Financially Stressed Consumers to Work with Utilities to Explore Options; Thanks Utilities for Safeguarding Essential Services; Encourages Conservation and Community Support

March 27, 2020

HARRISBURG – The Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (PUC) today urged financially-stressed households across the state to explore the many options available to help keep their monthly utility bills affordable – whether their concerns are related to the current COVID-19 crisis or other economic issues.

Now, more than ever, maintaining utility services is essential to the well-being of our families and communities, noted the five PUC Commissioners, stressing the availability of an assortment of PUC-required utility assistance programs, along with the merits of energy conservation and efficiency programs.

Tips for Financially-Stressed Households

The PUC offered the following tips for households experiencing financial difficulties:

- Contact your utilities to discuss the details and qualifications for their customer assistance programs (CAPs), especially if there have been recent changes in household income – even if you did not qualify for CAP in the past, you may now be eligible.
- Customers currently on CAPs who have experienced further reductions in household income should check with their utilities to determine if they qualify for additional assistance or more favorable financial options.
- Discuss your financial situation with your utilities before bills become delinquent to explore other possible options – this could include extended payment plans, budget billing, utility hardship funds and/or assistance through the federal **Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)** and federal Lifeline program (telecommunications and broadband access funding support to eligible low income individuals or households).

The PUC has already taken steps to **pause payment-related utility terminations** for residents and businesses across the state during the current emergency. The Commission also noted the value and impact of monthly utility payments, as these funds support the electric, natural gas, water, wastewater and telecommunications services we all depend upon.

Utilities across the state are committed to working with consumers to address these challenging circumstances – but they need to hear directly from families and businesses who are experiencing problems so they can begin those individual conversations about what resources and options are available.

Specifically, for households struggling financially during this crisis, it is important to work together with their utilities to tap into numerous utility assistance programs intended to make utility bills more manageable, to assist in payment options. These efforts will not only assist these household consumers throughout this emergency but will also minimize future financial challenges when the emergency has passed.

Although the PUC has temporarily paused payment-related utility terminations, it is important for consumers to understand that any past due bills or delinquent balances that remain after the current public health emergency has passed will be handled according to the rules

of the individual utilities and consistent with Commission policy.

Non-PUC Regulated Utility Services

The PUC noted that utilities across the state are firmly committed to maintaining essential services. Many systems that are largely outside the PUC's jurisdiction – such as municipal utilities, municipal authorities and cooperatives – have also moved to work with financially troubled consumers and suspend terminations. Consumers served by those non-PUC regulated systems should work directly with their municipality or co-op to address payment issues.

Additionally, national telecommunications companies are working with the Federal Communications Commission's **Keep America Connected** initiative to ensure that Americans do not lose their broadband or telephone connectivity during these exceptional circumstances. So far, more than 550 companies and associations have signed the FCC's pledge.

Energy Conservation

The PUC encourages families to explore energy conservation to help manage bills – especially as more people are working remotely and spending their entire day at home. This can have a notable impact on your energy usage. The PUC has interactive information and tips for saving energy on its energy shopping websites – **PAPowerSwitch.com** and **PAGasSwitch.com**.

Ways to Help Households in Need

Finally – for people looking for ways to help others during this time of crisis – the PUC encourages concerned citizens to explore various utility or community hardship funds or crisis support programs. Contributions to those programs directly help families who are having difficulty affording their utility service and work to safeguard the most vulnerable members of our communities. Check with your utilities or non-profit programs, like the **Dollar Energy Fund**, for more information about ways to help households in need.

About the PUC

The Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission balances the needs of consumers and utilities; ensures safe and reliable utility service at reasonable rates; protects the public interest; educates consumers to make independent and informed utility choices; furthers economic development; and fosters new technologies and competitive markets in an environmentally sound manner.

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