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Utility Shutoffs Allowed with Restrictions by Pennsylvania Public Utilities Commission

4-5 minutes

Many of the constituents that PEA serves may be affected by news that beginning November 9, 2020, utility companies in Pennsylvania are allowed to shut off non-paying customers' electricity, gas and water due to non-payment, with certain restrictions. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a moratorium on shutoffs since March 13th which was mandated by the Pennsylvania Public Utilities Commission (PUC).

On October 8th, the PUC voted 3-1 to reinstate service terminations. Vice Chair David Sweet was the only dissenting vote. The Commission did put a

number of conditions in place to potentially protect low-income residential families and small businesses that are experiencing significant struggles due to the pandemic. Some of the conditions include:

- **No termination for protected customers** – This means that residential customers with income within the 300% of the Federal Poverty Income cannot get their services terminated by any utility company unless otherwise authorized by the Commission. The protected customer must apply for all available assistance as well as request a payment arrangement with the utility company.
- **Special outreach for customers at risk of termination** – Utility companies must reach out to residential and commercial customers who are at risk of termination due to their unpaid balances after the moratorium is lifted. They must also provide the customer with options for addressing overdue balances. This communication must be sent out to customers 10 days prior to the 10-day traditional notice which will provide customers with

a total of 20 days notice.

- **Payment Arrangement for small businesses** – Utilities shall offer a payment arrangement for small businesses with a period of no less than 18 months. All small business owners who stay current on their payment arrangement and bill services shall not be terminated.
- **Waiver for connection/reconnection fees** – Protected customers will be waived of all connection, reconnection, and deposit fees.
- **No late payment charges** – Protected customers will be waived of all late fees.
- **Flexible income verification** – Utilities and the PUC's Bureau of Consumer Services can utilize flexible methods to verify customer income for assistance programs, payment plans and qualification.

Tens of thousands of Pennsylvania residents and small businesses are behind in paying their utility bills. The moratorium on utility shutoffs has protected many of the state's most vulnerable

consumers and small businesses during this time. It is not known how many residents and small businesses may be impacted by the lifting of the moratorium and are at risk for having their utilities cut off.

The actual impact of the lifting of the shutoff ban is limited in duration because energy utilities are prohibited from shutting off customers during the winter heating months, from the end of November to the end of March.

If you are a business or individual needing help with your utility bills, contact your utility to arrange for a payment plan. The following is a partial list of energy assistance programs that may be of assistance.

- [PA PUC Energy Assistance Programs](#)
- [Community Programs | ECA](#)
- [PECO's Universal Service Programs – RHLS](#)
- Philadelphia [Customer Assistance Programs](#)
- [PGW Assistance programs and grants.](#)

Senate Bill 1234 was introduced in the [Senate](#) by

Senator Tom Killion and in the [House](#) by Representative Chris Quinn. It would appropriate \$150 million of CARES Act money to assist those needing utility assistance as a result of the pandemic. The legislation is pending and the likelihood of passage is unknown at this time.

References:

[Utilities can soon cut off nonpaying customers, Pa. says, but the poorest customers are protected](#)

[Commission votes to end COVID-19 utility shutoff moratorium](#)

[Chairman Dutrieuille Motion](#)

[Hundreds of thousands of people face utility shutoffs as pandemic surges](#)