



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PUC Creates Added 2021 Safeguards to Help Households and Small Businesses Address Past-Due Utility Bills

Extended Payment Plans Available for Residential and Small Business Utility Customers to Stay Connected and Gradually Pay Down Balances

HARRISBURG – The Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (PUC) today approved a plan that establishes an array of extended payment plan options to help residential and small business utility customers stay connected to service while gradually paying-down past-due balances.

In a [motion offered by Chairman Gladys Brown Dutrieuille](#) at today's PUC public meeting, the Chair noted many public health and financial factors still impacting consumers, businesses and utilities across the state, including continued COVID-19 infections, unemployment, and substantial past-due balances for utilities – while also recognizing the positive potential of increased vaccinations, the gradual improvement of the economy and millions of dollars in available state and federal assistance for utility customers and others working to overcome the impacts of the pandemic.

In recognition of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission's March 13 Emergency Order, and the accumulation of customer arrearages, it is appropriate for utilities and the Commission to offer extended repayment terms to residential and small business customers.

Today's action by the PUC requires all Commission-regulated electric, natural gas, water, wastewater, telecommunications, and steam utilities to modify their existing collection policies to provide additional payment plan options for residential and small business customers. With those added protections in-place, the PUC's utility service termination moratorium is lifted, effective April 1, 2021.

Additional Payment Plan Options

- For residential customers with incomes below 250% of federal income guidelines (FPIG), a utility is required to offer a payment arrangement length of a minimum of 5 years while allowing the customer to agree to or request a shorter payment arrangement and the utility to agree to a longer payment arrangement.
- For residential customers with incomes between 250% and 300% of the federal guidelines, a utility is required to offer a payment arrangement length of a minimum of

2 years while allowing the customer to agree to or request a shorter payment arrangement and the utility to agree to a longer payment arrangement.

- For residential customers with incomes over 300% of the federal guidelines, a utility is required to offer a payment arrangement for a minimum length of 1 year while allowing the customer to agree to or request a shorter payment arrangement and the utility to agree to a longer payment arrangement.
- For small business customers, a utility is required to offer a payment arrangement for a minimum length of 18 months while allowing the customer to agree to or request a shorter payment arrangement and the utility to agree to a longer payment arrangement.

NOTE: The [federal income guidelines \(FPIG\)](#) are used nationally to determine eligibility for numerous state and federal income-qualified programs and vary based on household size. For example, the FPIG income level for a family of four is \$26,500 per year. With this as a baseline, the PUC's "250%" threshold for the longest payment plans would be an annual income of \$66,250 for a family of four, while the "300%" threshold would be an annual income of \$79,500 for a family of four.

Additionally, utilities and the PUC's Bureau of Consumer Services may continue to use flexible means for income verification and business status information – such as over-the-phone or via electronic mail, for the purpose of qualifying customers for payment arrangements and/or universal service programs.

Added Protections for Consumers Filing Complaints

In response to informal and formal complaints filed by utility customers by Dec. 31, 2021, the Commission may take the following action:

- Order one extended payment arrangement for a residential customer who is eligible for a new payment arrangement under the Public Utility Code, or for a residential customer who has previously defaulted on a Commission payment arrangement.
- Order one payment arrangement for a small business customer.

Utility Reporting

Utilities shall submit quarterly reports to the Commission for the remaining three quarters of 2021 – in addition to reports already required in March of this year – detailing the following:

- Total number of accounts at risk of termination at the end of the month and for the same month in 2019 and 2020.
- Total aggregate dollars of arrears at the end of the month and for the same month in 2019 and 2020 (both total and by vintage, i.e., 30-60 days, 60-90 days, 90+days).
- The number of accounts disconnected for non-payment with dollar amounts owed.

The quarterly reports shall be filed by July 15, 2021, for the second quarter of 2021. Following that, reports shall be submitted by the fifteenth of the month following the quarter, for the remainder of 2021.

The information shall be separated by residential and commercial accounts and should include information about accounts enrolled in Customer Assistance Programs, if appropriate.

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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