

Commission's Dispute Process and Your Rights

1. How do I get help with a dispute about a utility company?

First, you must contact the [utility company](#) or [supplier](#) to try to resolve the problem. They are required by law to assist you. If you are not satisfied with the company's action, you may file a complaint with the Office of External Relations (OER). (See [Complaint Procedures](#).)

2. What kind of problems can the Office of External Relations (OER) help me with?

OER can investigate your inquiry or dispute if it concerns:

- a. utility rates and charges;
- b. a proposed or recent turn-off of service;
- c. responsibility for a bill;
- d. a request for a deposit;
- e. [Telephone "slamming."](#)
- f. refusal of service by a utility;
- g. the quality and type of utility service;
- h. electric and / or gas supplier disputes;
- i. a utility's policies and procedures;
- j. utility meter, line or equipment installations.

OER cannot help with inquiries or disputes concerning a matter that does not fall within the jurisdiction of the Public Service Commission. See [referral information](#) on matters that fall outside of the Commission's jurisdiction.

3. What will happen to my dispute if I contact the Office of External Relations (OER) before contacting the utility or supplier about my problem?

After you file your complaint with OER, the utility (or supplier) is contacted for information about your account. If it is discovered that you never contacted the company about your problem, or you contacted OER without the company finishing its investigation, you may be notified by OER that your dispute is withdrawn. This is because the Commission's [Dispute Regulations](#) require that you to bring your dispute to the company first. A consumer's contact to OER should not be the first time that the company is hearing about your problem. By the time OER gets involved in a dispute, there should already have been an investigation by the company.

If after a dispute is withdrawn and you are still not satisfied with the company's response, you can re-submit the dispute to OER for a response. At that time you should include with your filing a copy of the company's response (if in writing) and you should explain in your own words why you are not satisfied with the company. You should also provide whatever documents you have (i.e., copies of bills, proof of payment(s), copy of the supplier's contract, etc.) that will support your case. If you file your dispute utilizing the Commission's [online complaint form](#), you can provide the additional information via fax to (410) 333-6844. If you send a fax you should also include your complaint number starting with MPSC# that had been assigned to you.

4. What kind of help may I expect from the Office of External Relations (OER) concerning my dispute?

OER is a dispute resolution office, not a consumer advocacy office. OER will provide free dispute resolution services to utility customer account holders and applicants for regulated utility service. This includes disputes against gas and electric suppliers. After receipt of an inquiry, OER shall initiate a review and an investigation to resolve the matter that includes:

- a. Obtaining information from the utility (or supplier) and customer;
- b. Providing an opportunity for the company and customer to each respond in writing to the position or information provided to OER by the other party;
- c. Reviewing applicable statutes, regulations, and tariffs; and if appropriate
- d. Mediate between the parties with the intention of assisting the parties to reach a resolution.

OER will provide its determination to you in writing and also include your right to request further review if you are not satisfied. The company also has a right to seek further review if the decision is not favorable to the company.

5. Do I have to pay my bill if it is disputed?

At the time you file your dispute you are required to state the amount that is disputed and why you feel the bill is incorrect. A customer may withhold payment of the disputed amount while the dispute is under investigation by either the utility or Commission. However, a customer cannot stop paying their bill all together. Also a customer cannot dispute future bills. A utility may require that you pay the undisputed portion of a bill and all future bills while resolution or disposition of a dispute or inquiry is pending. The utility may terminate your service if you fail to pay the undisputed portion of your bill.

6. Can the utility terminate my service while I have a dispute pending?

The utility cannot terminate your service while your dispute is pending if you are paying the undisputed bills and keeping up on payment of your future bills. However, if you fail to pay the undisputed bills and/or do not keep up on your current bills, the utility can terminate your service provided that the utility sends you notice at least 14 days in advance.

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