

COMMISSIONERS

JASON M. STANEK
CHAIRMAN

MICHAEL T. RICHARD
ANTHONY J. O'DONNELL
ODOGWU OBI LINTON
PATRICE M. BUBAR



CONTACT: Tori Leonard
410-767-8054
443-829-9111 (c)
tori.leonard@maryland.gov

**Maryland Public Service Commission Modifies Utility
Customer Protections Related to COVID-19 Pandemic;**
A hearing to further examine these issues to be held November 10

For Immediate Release: August 25, 2022

Media Contact: Tori Leonard | tori.leonard@maryland.gov | (410) 767-8054

(BALTIMORE, MD) – Two years after establishing enhanced consumer protections for utility disconnections in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Maryland Public Service Commission is modifying several of its heightened requirements. As the impact of the pandemic on the state’s economy and ratepayers changes, the Commission is responding to the current reality of growing customer arrearages which will burden all utility ratepayers. The Commission is also encouraging electric and gas utilities to work with their customers to ensure continued payment and minimize unnecessary disconnections.

The modifications include the following:

- Utilities must continue to give longer notice before terminating service on a residential account; the new requirement is 30 days notice rather than the 14-day pre-pandemic standard.
- Utilities must continue to offer 12-month payment plans for all residential customers who have fallen behind on their bills. During the pandemic, the Commission required utilities to offer 24-month payment plans for those customers receiving energy assistance from the state’s Office of Home Energy Programs. However, the \$83 million in RELIEF Act funds provided last year significantly lowered the balances owed by OHEP recipients.
- The Commission will continue to prohibit utilities from requiring down payments and deposits from residential customers as a prerequisite to enrolling in a payment plan.
- The Commission will no longer require utilities to offer more than one “second chance” to customers who default on prior payment plans. Based on the data provided,

allowing customers to continuously enroll in payment plans does not increase the likelihood that a customer will successfully pay the balances owed.

The Commission will hold a legislative-style hearing on November 10, 2022 at 10 a.m. to further examine these issues, including termination notice periods, payment plan lengths, and number of permitted defaults. At the hearing, the utilities will address the impact of the change in practices before and during the COVID-19 pandemic on both utility collection costs and payment-challenged customers. The Commission is interested in data showing the frequency of disconnections, length of time customers remain on utility service after an initial missed payment, and the percentage of arrearages ultimately collected by the utility.

###

About the Public Service Commission:

The Maryland Public Service Commission regulates electric and gas utilities and suppliers, telephone companies (land lines), certain water and sewer companies, passenger motor vehicle carriers for hire (sedans, limousines, buses, Uber, Lyft), taxicab companies (in Baltimore City and County, Charles County, Cumberland and Hagerstown) and bay pilot rates.