



Pandemic Utility Relief Guidance for Low-income Renters

Due to COVID19, low-income renters are more vulnerable to utilities shut-off. Extra services have been put in place to avoid mass utility shut-offs as a result of many people losing their income, and some regular programs have been suspended for health and safety reasons. Here are some resources and guidance to avoid these shut offs and better understand available services.

SHUT-OFF SUSPENSION INFORMATION

Due to COVID19 safety and health concerns, a number of utilities are suspending disconnections and reconnecting disconnected customers. This can occur through our agencies, or by a customer calling the utility. This is not formally under the jurisdiction of PUCO, but the major utilities providers say they will suspend disconnection or reconnect services *upon request*.

If taking advantage of this policy, **residents must contact your utility company first.** Although most utility companies are not disconnecting people, they will put a note in the resident's file indicating lack of payment. The resident should then contact their [local Energy Assistance Provider](#).

For water bills, no forms of payment assistance are currently available, but local jurisdictions have largely suspended water disconnections through the duration of the COVID19 crisis.

PROCESS OF UTILITY SHUT OFF

Residents will not automatically be enrolled in available programs, and must apply to receive the benefits available. If a resident is unable to make a payment, **they need to call their service provider directly.** Otherwise, the process for shut-off will proceed, and the energy company will:

- Send a notice in the resident's next bill
- Send a written notice of disconnection to the resident
- Visit your home to inform of the disconnection
- Disconnect service



GENERAL PROGRAMS & RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO LOW-INCOME RENTERS:

Home Weatherization Assistance Program (HWAP) – NONEMERGENCY SERVICES SUSPENDED

The Home Weatherization Assistance Program (HWAP) provides eligible Ohioans with assistance to improve the energy efficiency of their homes and reduce their energy costs. Ohioans participating in the HWAP will receive a home inspection to identify the services necessary to improve their home's energy efficiency. Services are provided through local agencies in each county.

COVID19-Related changes: All nonemergency services have been suspended to avoid unnecessary exposure to COVID19. Emergency services continue to be available during the COVID19 crisis. Emergency services include no heat, no hot water, or other time-sensitive, critical service interruptions. However, if anyone in the household is ill, they will not be able to receive emergency assistance. In which case, alternative living arrangements may need to be made.

Eligibility: Household income at or below 175 percent of the federal poverty guidelines are eligible for this program. [Click here to start the application process.](#)

[Home Energy Assistance Program \(HEAP\)](#)

The Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) is a federally funded program that provides eligible Ohioans assistance with their home energy bills. This one-time benefit is applied directly to the customer's utility bill or bulk fuel bill.

Eligibility: Ohioans with a household income at or below 175 percent of the federal poverty guidelines are eligible for the program. Assistance is provided on a sliding scale (e.g. households with elderly adults or children under six may receive more assistance). NOTE: Eligibility may change to include more Ohioans if additional funding is made available. [Click here to start the application process.](#)

[HEAP Winter Crisis Program \(Available now through May 1\)](#)

The Home Energy Assistance Winter Crisis Program (HEAP Winter Crisis Program) helps income eligible Ohioans that are threatened with disconnection, have been disconnected or have less than a 25 percent supply of bulk fuel in their tank maintain their utility service.

Ohio households, serviced by a PUCO-regulated utility, must sign up for the Percentage of Income Payment Plan Plus (PIPP Plus) or another payment plan in order to receive emergency benefits.

COVID19-Related Changes: The program typically runs from November 1 until March 31, but this year has been extended to May 1.



Eligibility: Household income at or below 175 percent of the federal poverty guidelines are eligible for this program. [Click here to start the application process.](#)

HEAP Summer Crisis Program (Available July 1-August 31)

The Home Energy Assistance Summer Crisis Program provides a one-time benefit to eligible Ohioans with cooling assistance during the summer months. The Program provides bill payment assistance for persons 60 years of age and older or those with a certified medical condition.

Eligibility: Household income at or below 175 percent of the federal poverty guidelines and have a member of the household who is at least 60 years old or can provide physician documentation that cooling assistance is needed for a household member's health.

Ohioans enrolled in the Percentage of Income Payment Plan Plus Program (PIPP Plus) are *not eligible* for bill payment assistance through the program but are encouraged to work with their local Energy Assistance Providers to identify opportunities for assistance. [Click here to start the application process.](#)

Percentage Income Payment Plan (PIPP)

The Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP) helps eligible Ohioans manage their energy bills year-round. Payments are based on a percentage of household income and are consistent year-round. If your home is heated with gas, you will have a monthly payment of 6% of your household income for your natural gas bill, and 6% of your household income for your electric bill. If you heat with electric, your monthly payment is 10% of your household income. The balance of your utility bill is subsidized by the state of Ohio. There is a minimum monthly payment of \$10.00.

COVID19-Related Changes: Reverification process has been suspended until May 1.

Eligibility: Household income at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty guidelines and have utility service from an electric or natural gas company regulated by the Public Utility Commission of Ohio are eligible for the program. *Both homeowners and renters are eligible for assistance.* [Click here to start the application process.](#)



DON'T FALL FOR SCAMS OR PREDATORY RECRUITMENT

Please note, **energy suppliers have been banned from doing door-to-door or in-person marketing** to avoid unnecessary social contact. Anyone claiming to be an energy representative is either violating the PUCO-issued ban or are falsely advertising their relationship to the energy supplier. There have been reports of door-to-door solicitations from individuals holding themselves out as energy suppliers and threatening shut-offs if they do not see the resident's energy bill.

If customers of PUCO-regulated electric and natural gas utilities desire price comparisons among competitors, they continue to have the option to enroll with a competitive supplier of their choosing. The Energy Choice website at energychoice.ohio.gov allows customers to compare offers from competitive suppliers.

If you have questions or concerns regarding your utility service, contact PUCO at <https://www.puco.ohio.gov/contact-us/>.