



Public Service Commission Chairman Lane's Column



July 20, 2020

Assistance Paying Utility Bills

Many of us need a little help from time to time. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic statewide shutdown, more people than ever are struggling to get back on their feet financially. If you have trouble paying your utility bills, the Public Service Commission may be able to help.

As soon as you fall behind on a utility bill, contact your utility company and ask about a deferred payment plan. This lets the utility know you are serious about resolving the situation. After you speak with your utility if you need further help you may contact the PSC's Consumer Affairs Technicians at 1-800-642-8544 from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Messages may be left at other times and staff will return your call.

There are several forms of assistance for which you may be eligible. Elderly low income customers can ask utilities for a 20% discount on heating bills from December to April. To qualify, a customer must be at least 60 years old and qualify for SNAP (formerly Food Stamps), SSI, or WV WORKS (formerly TANF).

Another resource for low income, elderly, or disabled customers is the Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP), a program to help with the costs of home heating, funded by the federal government and administered by the local offices of the WV-DHHR. LIEAP helps in the form of cash grants, financial aid, free furnace repairs, and home weatherization. Call your local DHHR office to determine your eligibility and find out when these funds may be available.

Other resources include the Dollar Energy Fund and programs run by various civic and religious organizations. To find out what is available in your area, call West Virginia 211 (dial 2-1-1) and ask about utility payment assistance.

For help paying for telephone or internet service, contact your service provider or your local DHHR office and ask about Lifeline. This program offers qualified customers a discount of \$7.25 per month for a stand-alone voice phone line or cell phone. It also provides a monthly discount of \$9.25 for fixed broadband service.

You are not alone. There are resources available to help West Virginians pay their utility bills. If you can't locate help on your own, the PSC's Consumer Affairs Technicians are always ready to help you find a solution.

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