



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION
400 NORTH STREET, HARRISBURG, PA 17120

Dear Utility CEO:

October 30, 2019

As winter approaches, it is time again for the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission's (PUC's) annual "Prepare Now" campaign, working together with utilities to identify and assist consumers who may struggle with the cost of cold-weather energy bills.

The PUC is particularly excited about this year's campaign, as we are on the verge of sweeping changes to energy affordability programs in the Commonwealth – with a special focus on the most vulnerable households. In September, the Commission advanced two major proposals focused on lowering the maximum "energy burden" for low-income Customer Assistance Program (CAP) participants and ensuring effective and efficient utility programs for at-risk consumers.

Throughout the process, our focus has been on fulfilling the mandate to: "continue the protections, policies and services that assist customers who are low-income to afford utility service." Over the coming year, Pennsylvania will see utility CAPs evolve and grow – but there also are actions that every utility can do right now to reach consumers who are at-risk.

Energy services – whether electric or gas – are essential for health, safety, a livable home, child development and maintaining vibrant communities. Energy unaffordability is an unsustainable burden for many thousands of Pennsylvanians, and while the Commission's forward-leaning actions are intended to enhance future services, it is imperative that we work together in the short term to help consumers prepare for the coming winter.

You – the utilities that provide essential services every day to millions of Pennsylvanians – are the first and most direct mechanisms to link struggling households with much-needed assistance. You know your communities; you know the resources available; and you have the ability and the flexibility to work directly with customers. With that in mind, the Commission urges companies to maximize their pre-winter outreach, including:

- Urging consumers on limited or fixed incomes to enroll in utility company programs to help make energy bills more affordable – including CAPs, Low-Income Usage Reduction Programs (LIURPs) and budget billing.
- Reminding low-income households that they may be eligible for grants under the federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) or Hardship Funds.
- Educating consumers about conservation and ways to reduce energy usage.
- Increasing corporate donations to and fundraising for utility Hardship Funds and other local programs that assist consumers who need help paying their utility bills.

- Limiting the number of terminations of confirmed low-income consumers by scaling back the company's termination program as cold weather and the winter termination moratorium approach. This includes reviewing termination and reconnection procedures to allow consumers who are making a good faith effort to pay their bills to maintain essential service.
- Exercising leniency when establishing payment arrangement plans for all consumers. When assessing whether to grant a payment arrangement, please consider changes in circumstances such as lost or reduced income, extended illness of the ratepayer or a household member, or increased household size and accompanying expenses.

Education and consumer outreach are the most direct actions utilities can take immediately to increase participation in vital assistance programs before winter weather descends on the state. Also, utilities have more flexibility to make allowances for payment-troubled customers than the PUC does.

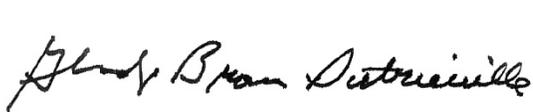
Last year, utilities across Pennsylvania spent more than \$400 million on universal service programs, not counting the federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). Collectively, these utility programs reach nearly 300,000 electric customers and over 156,000 natural gas customers, reducing monthly energy bills; promoting weatherization and other improvements to cut energy consumption; and supporting hardship programs. These are substantial programs that make a noticeable difference.

For more than 15 years, the "Prepare Now" campaign has focused on assisting consumers to maintain essential utility service over the winter, by educating them about essential programs; increasing awareness of conservation and other ways to reduce energy costs; and encouraging collaborative efforts to address energy affordability concerns.

Feel free to offer any additional suggestions you may have that would improve our efforts. Send any comments to Sasha Oberheim in the Bureau of Consumer Services at soberheim@pa.gov.

Thank you for your cooperation and continued efforts to address this pressing concern.

Sincerely,



Gladys M. Brown Dutrieuille
Chairman



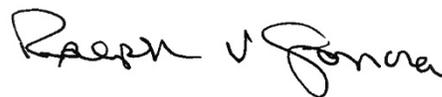
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