



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION
HARRISBURG, PA

Oct. 28, 2020

Dear Utility CEO:

The approaching winter heating season marks an unprecedented time for Pennsylvania consumers, businesses, and public utilities. The health and financial impacts of COVID-19 continue to be felt across our state and country, and it is essential that we work together to ensure the safety of our neighbors and our communities.

In past years, we have reached out to you – our public utility leadership – during the kick-off of the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission’s (PUC’s) annual “Prepare Now” campaign, emphasizing the importance of identifying and assisting consumers struggling with the cost of cold-weather energy bills. That mission has never been more important.

Since the pandemic began, the PUC has taken steps to safeguard families and small businesses facing financial difficulties, while also establishing a framework for future discussions about utility assistance and economic recovery. We should emphasize that these new Commission-required measures – including protection against termination for income-qualified consumers; payment plans for small businesses; the waivers of fees and late charges for protected consumers; and other steps – are a starting point for assistance that public utilities can offer.

Our public utilities are the first and most direct mechanisms to link struggling households with much-needed assistance. You provide essential services every day to millions of Pennsylvanians; you know your communities; you know the resources available; and you have the ability and the flexibility to work directly with customers.

And, as we have noted at the start of previous winters, utilities in Pennsylvania have much more flexibility to make allowances for payment-troubled customers than the PUC does. So, this winter, more than ever before, we ask you to work closely with the households and businesses you serve by:

- Urging income-qualified consumers – especially those who may not have been reached in past years – to apply for assistance from programs designed to help make energy bills more affordable, including Customer Assistance Programs, Low-Income Usage Reduction Programs (LIURPs) and budget billing.
- Reminding households that they may be eligible for grants under the federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) or Hardship Funds.
- Exercising leniency when establishing payment arrangement plans for all consumers, including consideration for circumstances such as lost or reduced income, extended illness of a household member, or increased household size and accompanying expenses.

- Educating consumers about conservation and ways to reduce energy usage.
- And increasing corporate donations to and fundraising for utility Hardship Funds and other local programs that assist consumers who need help paying their utility bills.

Moving Pennsylvania forward requires a mix of holistic, short-term and long-term solutions – which the PUC continues to explore – but first and foremost we need to deal with the cold weather that will soon be on our doorsteps. 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, and we look forward to working together with our utilities and other concerned parties on this important mission.

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 help customers.



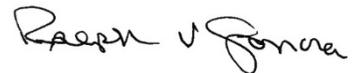
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