Be UtilityWise PITTSBURGH

2026

Building Connections to Affordability: Collaborative Strategies for Lasting Change



Hilton Garden Inn Pittsburgh - Southpointe
1000 Corporate Drive, Canonsburg, PA

Building Connections to Affordability: Collaborative Strategies for Lasting Change

Registration & Breakfast
8 - 8:50 a.m. | Parlors A & B

Welcome
8:50 - 9 a.m. | Parlors A & B

Are You Getting What You Pay For?
9 - 9:45 a.m. | Parlors A & B

Affordability First:
Exploring Utility Assistance Programs & BUW BINGO
9:45 - 11:15 a.m. | Parlors A & B

Break
11:15 - 11:30 a.m.

2026 LIHEAP Update
11:30 a.m. - Noon | Parlors A & B

Winter Energy Pricing & Regulatory Insights
Noon - 12:30 p.m. | Parlors A & B

Leveraging ALICE and 211 Data to Understand Community Need
12:30 - 1 p.m. | Parlors A & B

Lunch & Networking
1 - 2 p.m. | Parlors A & B

Breakout Sessions
2:05 - 2:35 p.m.

Legal Help is Just a Call Away
Parlor C

Strategies to Keep Families Connected to Utility Service
Parlor D

Breakout Sessions
2:40 - 3:10 p.m.

Benefits of Weatherizing Homes
Parlor C

Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank Services
Parlor D

Effective Strategies for Managing Debt
Allegheny Room

Complete Evaluations, Raffle & Closing
3:15 - 3:45 p.m. | Parlors A & B

AGENDA

General Sessions: Parlors A & B

8 - 8:50 a.m. **Registration & Breakfast**

8:50 - 9 a.m. **Welcome & Special Remarks**

Christina Chase-Pettis, Sr. Communications Specialist, PAPUC

9 - 9:45 a.m. **Are You Getting What You Pay For?**

Mary Bach, AARP Pennsylvania Volunteer, Chair, Consumer Issues Task Force

Do you ever feel "ripped off" when shopping? Do you understand Pennsylvania's amusing and confusing sales tax applications? When you fill your tank with a gallon of gas, how can you be sure that's what you received? Have you noticed that product packaging seems to be shrinking while prices stay the same? Do you find yourself hunting for prices while shopping, or have you ever been overcharged at a checkout scanner? Your shopping trips will never be the same after this entertaining and educational presentation packed with important consumer information.

Join us for an engaging and informative presentation, this session promises to be both entertaining and enlightening!

9:45 - 11:15 a.m. **Affordability First: Exploring Utility Assistance Programs & Be Utility Wise BINGO**

Lynda Merrill, Associate Business Analyst, FirstEnergy
Jennifer Ervin, Universal Services Analyst III, Duquesne Light
Alexa Mapstone, Outreach & Education Coordinator, Columbia Gas
Danielle Stelzer, Community Assistance Programs Specialist, Peoples Gas
Stephanie Vaughan, Sr. Compliance Analyst, Customer Assistance Programs, PA American Water
Sarah Viszneki, Pgh2O Cares Coordinator, Pittsburgh Water
Amanda Messmer, Program Manager, Dollar Energy Fund

Join us for an engaging session with representatives from electric, gas, and water utility companies, alongside the Dollar Energy Fund. They will offer a comprehensive overview of their assistance programs and grant funding options designed to enhance affordability for customers. This panel will highlight how these organizations collaborate to address community needs effectively.

Be prepared for some interactive fun with rounds of BUW Bingo throughout the presentations. Don't miss this opportunity to learn and enjoy yourself!

11:15 - 11:30 a.m. **Break**

11:30 a.m. - Noon **LIHEAP Update**

Travis Michaux, Human Services Analyst, PA Department of Human Services

Representatives from the Department of Human Services (DHS) will provide in-depth updates on the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) for the upcoming LIHEAP season. This session will deliver the latest program guidelines, eligibility requirements, application process and any changes to benefits to ensure understanding and access to the LIHEAP.

Noon - 12:30 p.m. **Winter Energy Pricing & Regulatory Insights**

Dan Mumford, Director, Office of Competitive Market Oversight, PAPUC

This PUC regulatory update will include important information about utility imposters, service termination rules, and what winter heating costs look like as we enter the heating season. Dan will also discuss the increasing cost of electricity, why prices have been going up, and what to expect in the future.

12:30 - 1 p.m. **Leveraging ALICE and 211 Data to Understand Community Need**

Sean Fox, Strategic Intiatives Director, United Way 211

How do we better define what it looks like for our families, friends, and neighbors to obtain financial stability while recognizing where we currently stand as a region when it comes to affordability? Behind every call for help is a larger story about community need. By combining ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) and real-time 211 data, this session provides a powerful view of the households that are working hard yet still struggling to make ends meet. Explore emerging trends, affordability challenges, and unmet needs affecting communities across the region, and learn how these insights can help frontline staff, nonprofit leaders, and community partners strengthen services, align resources, and make more informed decisions that drive meaningful impact.

1 - 2 p.m. **Lunch & Networking**

Parlors A & B

2:05 - 2:35 p.m. **Afternoon Breakout Sessions**

Legal Help is Just a Call Away

Parlor C

Dan Clearfield, Public Utility Law Section, Member
Eckert Seamans Cherin & Mellott, LLC

The Pennsylvania Free Legal Answers program is a virtual legal advice clinic run by the Pennsylvania Bar Association. Licensed Pennsylvania attorneys volunteer their time to provide basic legal advice without any expectation of long-term representation. Learn more about how consumers can use the program for public utility questions, and more!

Strategies to Keep Families Connected to Utility Service

Parlor D

Lauren Berman, Senior Staff Attorney, Pennsylvania Utility Law Project

Join the Pennsylvania Utility Law Project (PULP) for a primer on how to keep families connected to essential electric, heat, and water services. In this interactive session, participants will learn about the impact of utility insecurity and the legal protections that can keep families connected.

2:40 - 3:10 p.m. **Afternoon Breakout Sessions**

Benefits of Weatherizing Homes

Parlor C

Joshua Locke, Energy Auditor II, Mincin Insulation/Peak Home IQ

Weatherizing homes enhances energy efficiency, leading to reduced energy costs and improved comfort. This session will explore various weatherization measures, including furnace clean and tune-ups, resolution of heating safety issues, sidewall, and attic insulation, caulking and weather stripping, and blower door guided air sealing. The specific measures may vary based on available utility and assistance funds. Join us at the weatherization breakout session to learn more about how these improvements can benefit you and your home.

Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank Services

Parlor D

Patricia Ferricks, Community Connections Partnership Supervisor
Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank

At Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank, we are committed to providing access to healthy, nutritious food in an effort to end hunger in our 11-county service area of Southwestern PA. We also know that it takes more than food alone to fight hunger and its root causes. Learn more about the services we offer to our neighbors including food assistance, help with SNAP, and referrals to partners that address root causes of hunger.

Effective Strategies for Managing Debt

Allegheny Room

Heather Murray, Vice President, Advantage Credit

Consumer debt continues to reach staggering levels, creating significant challenges for individuals and families striving for financial stability. This session will provide practical strategies for helping clients understand their debt-management options and make informed financial decisions. You will learn various approaches to managing debt, along with strategies for helping consumers develop a path toward greater financial stability and long-term financial well-being.

3:15 - 3:45 p.m. **Complete Evaluations, Raffle & Closing**

Parlors A & B

www.surveymonkey.com/r/R3GV8FQ

Please complete your evaluation.
Your feedback is important to us!

Be UtilityWise

Guest Speaker

MARY BACH



Mary Bach is a long-time, nationally recognized, independent Consumer Advocate. As a volunteer, she is also Chair of the AARP Pennsylvania Consumer Issues Task Force.

A former high school teacher, Mary was elected Murrysville Councilwoman for four years, and then elected Franklin Regional School Board Member for eight years. She has numerous television and radio credits, including appearances on the "Today Show," "Good Morning America," "Donahue," and "Dateline," as well as many segments on local TV programs and talk-radio shows. She has been a featured speaker or workshop presenter at numerous state, national, and international conferences on a wide variety of consumer issues. She appears monthly on ABC27's "GoodDayPA" in Harrisburg, PA, providing the FraudWatch segments, and weekends doing the "FraudWatch Minute." She is also a frequent guest on "Focus on Aging Adults" on PCN-TV.

Mary has been on the forefront of telemarketing issues, from the consumer's perspective. She is Vice President of the Scanning Certification Advisory Board, helping to set industry standards for retail pricing accuracy at the checkout. She has had Governor's appointments to three statewide committees. She is now in her third term as a member of the PA PUC's Consumer Advisory Council, representing the general public. She was honored as 1999 National Consumer of the Year at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., and also has received the Jefferson Award Bronze Medal. In 2004, she was awarded AARP's prestigious Andres Award, the organization's highest honor for community service. In 2006, the Pennsylvania Association of Weights and Measures named their annual consumer award after her, "The Mary Bach Consumer of the Year Award," for her efforts in promoting marketplace fairness. In 2016, she received the AARP "Ethel Award for Community Outreach." In 2018, she was honored by AARP nationally as one of 12 "Superstar Volunteers" and was the recipient of the AARP 2018 National Trailblazer Award. In 2019, she was honored with the Westinghouse SURE Lifetime Achievement Award. Mary is the mother of two, and the grandmother of four. She resides in Murrysville, PA.

Be UtilityWise

Committee Members

Christina Chase-Pettis, PAPUC
Shari A. Williams, PAPUC
Regina Carter, PAPUC
Lynda Merrill, First Energy
Virgil Kennedy, FirstEnergy
Danielle Stelzer, Peoples Gas
Dave Defide, Duquesne Light
Jennifer Ervin, Duquesne Light
Stephanie Vaughan, Pennsylvania American Water
Alexa Mapstone, Columbia Gas
Sarah Viszneki, Pittsburgh Water & Sewer Authority
Ashley Neapolitan, Dollar Energy Fund
Eden Safar, Catholic Charities
Gretchen Hartman, Holy Family Institute
Heather Murray, Advantage Credit Counseling

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