Be UtilityWise JOHNSTOWN

2026

Building Connections to Affordability: Collaborative Strategies for Lasting Change



University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown
Living and Learning Center
450 Schoolhouse Road, Johnstown, PA

Building Connections to Affordability: Collaborative Strategies for Lasting Change

Registration & Breakfast
8:30 - 8:55 a.m.

Welcome
8:55 - 9 a.m.

Powering Connection: Understanding Poverty and Navigating Systems Together
9 - 11 a.m.

Strategies to Keep Families Connected to Utility Service in Pennsylvania
11 - 11:30 a.m.

Winter Energy Pricing and Regulatory Insights
11:30 a.m. - 12 p.m.

Lunch
12 - 1 p.m.

Are You Getting What You Pay For?
1 - 1:45 p.m.

Affordability First: Exploring Utility Assistance Programs & BUW BINGO
1:45 - 2:30 p.m.

SNAP Myths and Facts: How This Kitchen Table Issue Affects Everyone
2:30 - 3 p.m.

Legal Help is Just a Click Away
3 - 3:30 p.m.

Complete Evaluation, Raffle & Closing Remarks
3:30 - 3:45 p.m.

AGENDA



8:30 - 8:55 a.m. **Registration & Breakfast**

8:55 - 9 a.m. **Welcome**

Christina Chase-Pettis, Sr. Communications Specialist, PAPUC

9 - 11 a.m. **Powering Connection: Understanding Poverty and Navigating Systems Together**

Join us for an interactive session designed to deepen your understanding of poverty and the challenges people may face when navigating bills, services, and support systems. Participants will gain practical tools for recognizing barriers, communicating with greater clarity and empathy, and helping people better understand and navigate available processes and resources. You will strengthen both your daily work and the experience of the individuals and families we serve.

Kimberly Robertson, MSOL, Community Engagement & Workforce Pathways, Catholic Charities, Inc., Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown
Cindy O'Connor, Executive Director, Catholic Charities, Inc., Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown

11 - 11:30 a.m. **Strategies to Keep Families Connected to Utility Service in Pennsylvania**

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.

Ria Pereira, Director of Litigation, Pennsylvania Utility Law Project

11:30 a.m. - 12 p.m. **Winter Energy Pricing and Regulatory Insights**

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.

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

12 - 1 p.m. **Lunch**

1 - 1:45 p.m. **Are You Getting What You Pay For?**

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 actually 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!

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

1:45 - 2:30 p.m. **Affordability First: Exploring Utility Assistance Programs & BUW BINGO**

Join us for an engaging session with representatives from electric, gas, and water utility companies, alongside the county assistance office. They will offer a comprehensive overview of their assistance programs and LIHEAP — and grant finding 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!

Virgil Kennedy, Assistant Business Analyst, FirstEnergy
Danielle Stelzer, Community Assistance Programs Specialist, Peoples Natural Gas
Tammy Ravier, Customer Outreach Education Coordinator, Columbia Gas of PA
Holly Burkhart, Income Maintenance Admin. 1, Department of Human Services, Cambria County Assistance Office

2:30 - 3 p.m. **SNAP Myths and Facts: How This Kitchen Table Issue Affects Everyone**

SNAP is one of the nation's most effective nutrition assistance programs, driving meaningful economic impact and helping families access the food they need — but widespread misinformation can make it hard to know what's real. This session will provide clear, research based explanations to dispel common myths about SNAP and highlight how the program benefits not only people facing food insecurity but entire communities. The Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank works with more than 1,000 partners across 11 counties to distribute enough food for over 52 million meals each year. Learn more or get involved at pittsburghfoodbank.org.

Ruschelle Dillon, Community Connections Partnership Coordinator
Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank

3 - 3:30 p.m. **Legal Help is Just a Click Away**

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!

Christy Appleby, Senior Assistant Consumer Advocate
PA Office of Consumer Advocate

3:30 - 3:45 p.m. **Complete Evaluation, Raffle & Closing Remarks**

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/LN2SN6N

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 PAPUC'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 JOHNSTOWN

Committee Members

Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission
Christina Chase-Pettis
Shari A. Williams
Regina Carter

Department of Human Services - Cambria County Assistance Office
Holly Burkhart
Naomi Wilson

Peoples Natural Gas
Danielle Stelzer

FirstEnergy (Penelec)
Virgil Kennedy

Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown
Cindy O'Connor

Columbia Gas of PA/MD/VA
Tammy Ravier
Alexa Mapstone

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