

100 Pine Street • PO Box 1166 • Harrisburg, PA 17108-1166  
Tel: 717.232.8000 • Fax: 717.237.5300

Pamela C. Polacek  
Direct Dial: 717.237.5368  
ppolacek@mcneeslaw.com

June 12, 2020

Rosemary Chiavetta, Secretary  
Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission  
Commonwealth Keystone Building  
400 North Street, 2nd Floor  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

**VIA ELECTRONIC FILING**

**RE: COVID-19 Customer Service, Billing, and Public Outreach Provisions  
Request for Utility Information, Docket No. M-2020-3020055**

Dear Secretary Chiavetta:

Attached please find the responses of Wellsboro Electric Company ("Wellsboro" or "Company") to the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission's ("PUC" or "Commission") request for COVID-19 utility customer service, billing, and public outreach information in its May 29, 2020, Secretarial Letter issued in the above-referenced docket.

Wellsboro appreciates the Commission's desire to stay abreast of how the COVID-19 emergency declaration is impacting Pennsylvania consumers and utilities. As set forth in the attached responses, Wellsboro has experienced an increase in the number of delinquent accounts for both residential and non-residential customers in comparison to prior years. The Company has abided by the Commission's Emergency Order that prevents the pursuit of termination for those accounts.

While the Emergency Order is prohibiting termination, the arrearages for many of the accounts continue to grow without the customers seeking payment arrangements. Some of those arrearages accrued prior to the Governor's Emergency Declaration in March 2020 and were subject to the 2019-2020 winter moratorium, which was extended by the Emergency Order. Wellsboro recognizes the financial struggles that many customers are facing due to the COVID-19 pandemic; however, the Company submits that the accumulation of large arrearages without good faith efforts to apply for a payment arrangement or to make partial payments is not in the public interest.

In addition, we urge the Commission to consider that our efforts to collect the past due amounts that have accrued during the Emergency Order moratorium may be hampered by the onset of the 2020-2021 winter moratorium. Utilities should have a reasonable window to terminate accounts or enter into payment arrangements with eligible customers prior to the start of the next winter moratorium.

Wellsboro respectfully requests that the Commission provide a definitive end date for the current moratorium, subject to the ability of customers to seek payment arrangements to avoid termination. The schedule proposed by Duquesne Light Company in its comments at this docket, which would enable termination to commence on or around August 3, 2020, is an acceptable timeline for the

Rosemary Chiavetta, Secretary  
June 12, 2020  
Page 2

transition from the Emergency Order moratorium. Wellsboro stands ready to negotiate payment arrangements with residential and non-residential customers to mitigate the financial impact of repaying the arrearages.

If you have any questions concerning this matter, please contact the undersigned. Thank you.

Very truly yours,

McNEES WALLACE & NURICK LLC

By   
Pamela Polacek

Counsel to Wellsboro Electric Company

c: Sarah Dewey, BCS (via E-mail)  
Tom Charles, Director, Office of Communications (via E-mail)  
Tanya McCloskey, Office of Consumer Advocate (via E-mail)  
John R. Evans, Office of Small Business Advocate (via E-mail)  
Richard A. Kanaskie, Bureau of Investigation and Enforcement (via E-mail)

**COVID-19 Customer Service, Billing, and Public Outreach Provisions**  
**Request for Utility Information**  
**Docket No. M-2020-3020055**  
**Wellsboro Electric Company**  
**6/12/2020**

**I. COVID-19 Utility Consumer Service and Billing Policies and Procedures**

Describe and report efforts to support customers through initiatives in customer service and billing policies and procedures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing recovery period. Explain how these initiatives differ from normal operations:

**Termination of Utility Service:**

- After the Commission’s Emergency Order on Terminations at Docket No. M-2020-3019244 ends, how soon does the utility plan to begin termination of service for nonpayment? How does the utility plan to implement terminations and will it start the process with new termination notices?
  - On July 1, Company will begin notifying residential customers by letter or telephone call outlining the end of moratorium date and programs available to them.
  - On July 16, Company will begin sending 15-day residential termination notices with its first bill cycle with an August 3 termination date. Termination notices will follow weekly thereafter with the remaining bill cycles.
  - On July 27, Company will begin 72-hour disconnect notification with an August 3 termination date.

Terminations will begin August 3.

As always, Wellsboro Electric will make every effort to work with the customer to setup an adequate payment plan and refer the customer to available programs with terminating service as a last resort.

If moratorium is extended beyond August 3, Wellsboro Electric will implement a more aggressive collection strategy with the approaching winter moratorium.

- Broken out by customer class, how many customer accounts may be subject to termination if the Commission’s Emergency Order prohibiting terminations is rescinded and how does this number compare to the same time period in 2019?
  - Provide these figures for all utility confirmed low-income customers, including Lifeline and Customer Assistance Program (CAP) customers.

Accounts in Threat of Termination	Confirmed Low- Income	Residential	Commercial
2020	12	155	11
2019	6	119	9

- Provide future projections if available.

Wellsboro Electric does not have the capability to provide accurate future data.

- Is the utility currently assessing a “reconnection fee” to restore service? If yes, how is the fee billed and/or collected? Will this fee apply to customers reconnected under the Commission’s Emergency Order that wish to pay any arrearage and stay connected?

Wellsboro Electric has not terminated service. Once the Emergency Order concludes, the Company’s current policy is to assess a reconnection fee when service is terminated. Full payment of reconnect fee is required to restore service.

**Universal Service Programs:**

- Is the utility currently removing customers from CAP for non-payment or failure to recertify?

Wellsboro Electric does not offer a CAP program.

- What are the utility’s current Hardship Fund payment requirements to qualify low-income customers for grants (e.g., waiving payment history “good faith payment”, or CAP participation criteria) and have these requirements been revised due to the pandemic?

Our Hardship Fund requirements has remained the same:

**Other Assistance Initiatives:**

- Describe any policies/procedures the utility has updated to assist customers impacted by the pandemic that go beyond provisions in PUC policies or regulations.

Wellsboro Electric waived the third-party convenience fee for electronic payments.

- Describe any proposed or anticipated changes in programs/practices/policies to assist customers impacted by the pandemic after the Governor’s Emergency Proclamation and the PUC Emergency Order on Terminations expire or are lifted.

At this time, Wellsboro Electric is not planning any changes to existing policies. Wellsboro Electric will make every effort to work with the customer to setup an adequate payment/budget plan We refer customers to the LIHEAP Crisis Recovery program, Dollar Energy Fund hardship program and local churches and community service agencies.

## **II. Consumer Education and Outreach**

The Commission is specifically interested in how utilities are informing customers of their rights and responsibilities as ratepayers during the COVID-19 pandemic and in determining whether any gaps exist in consumer education and outreach efforts. The Commission directs all jurisdictional electric, natural gas, water, wastewater, and telecommunications utilities to submit to Tom Charles, [thcharles@pa.gov](mailto:thcharles@pa.gov), in the Commission’s Office of Communications, the following information, if applicable, regarding consumer education and outreach strategies related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing recovery period.

- Descriptions and/or examples of how the utilities are educating their customers about their rights and responsibilities, assistance programs, energy efficiency and conservation, and/or COVID-19 recovery.

The Company has frequently communicated through social media, our website, bill print messages, newspaper and radio advertising, and over the phone. Samples attached.

- Efforts to reach all utility consumers with information about income-qualified programs and resources and about non-income-qualified educational services, tools, and resources.

The Company has frequently communicated through social media, website, bill print messages, newspaper and radio advertising, and over the phone. Samples attached.

- Methods that utilities are using to make their customers aware of important proceedings that may include telephonic public input hearings and allowing consumers to be able to make their voices heard.

In accordance with PUC regulations, the Company provides notifications through the local newspaper, Company website, bill inserts or special mailings.

- Description of utility outreach methods that could be used to inform eligible Pennsylvanians about changes related to COVID-19 in the Lifeline Program for Telephone and Broadband Internet Service.

Wellsboro Electric does not have a Lifeline Program for Telephone and Broadband Internet Service.

Direct questions to: Danette Kerestes

Phone 570-724-6704

# We're Still Here for You

To Our Customers:

Wellsboro Electric Co. wishes to thank its customers for their patience and understanding during the unusual circumstances we all face due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

With our region now in the “yellow phase” of re-opening, we want to reassure our customers that we are still here for you and remain committed to keeping the power on just as we have for more than 125 years. All of our employees have continued to work to maintain the essential services we provide.

In the interest of doing our part to reduce the spread of the virus, we are continuing to keep our office closed to public entrance for the time being. This helps us honor the social distancing practices prescribed for the area re-opening by limiting employee and customer exposure to the corona virus.

We will continue to monitor the situation in order to establish an opening date and will convey that information once that has been determined.

In the meantime, we will continue to waive the convenience fees for credit or debit card payments by phone or through the SmartHub application available through our website, [wellsboroelectric.com](http://wellsboroelectric.com), or on your mobile device.

We understand the hardship some of our customers are facing during these challenging times. As we transition back to some form of normal in the coming months, Wellsboro Electric will work with customers who fall behind on their electric bills as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak to offer payment arrangements. Additional assistance for paying energy bills is now available through LIHEAP's Recovery Crisis Program. For more information, contact the Tioga County Assistance office at 570-724-4051.

While the Wellsboro Electric office remains closed to public traffic, we can always be reached by telephone 24/7. If you have a billing question, wish to connect a new service or report a power outage, please call 570-724-3516.

For additional information and future updates, please visit our website at [www.wellsboroelectric.com](http://www.wellsboroelectric.com) and “like” Wellsboro Electric on Facebook.





## Wellsboro Electric Company



Published by Watts Worth [?] · May 20 at 10:44 AM · 🌐

In response to the coronavirus (COVID- 19) health emergency, the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) will be accepting applications for its Recovery Crisis Program beginning May 18, 2020. The program is scheduled to run through August 31, 2020, or until funds are exhausted — whichever comes first.

To be eligible a household must, be in jeopardy of having their heating utility service terminated, be without heating utility service or heating fuel, or be within 15 days of being without heating fuel. The Crisis funds available to the household must be able to remedy the crisis situation. Have a total household income at or below 150 percent of the Federal Poverty Income Guidelines (FPIG)

Household Size Income Limit

1 \$18,735

2 \$25,365

3 \$31,995

4 \$38,625

LIHEAP applications are accepted through the COMPASS website [www.compass.state.pa.us](http://www.compass.state.pa.us) or by calling the Tioga County Assistance office 570-724-4051.

COMPASS.STATE.PA.US

**[www.compass.state.pa.us](http://www.compass.state.pa.us)**



## Wellsboro Electric Company



Published by Watts Worth [?] · May 15 at 9:01 AM · 🌐

If you have been financially affected by COVID-19 and are struggling to pay your electric bill, contact our office as soon as possible. We are willing to work with you to setup an adequate payment plan. We encourage you to pay on your account to keep your account balance as manageable as possible.



**Wellsboro Electric Company**  
 Serving the community since 1894  
 CALL US: (570)724-3516



[View/Pay Bill](#)

[View Outages](#)

[Home](#) [Customer Service](#) [News & Info](#) [Products & Services](#)

**24-7** EMERGENCY CALLS  
 (570) 724-3516



**Dial 811**  
 BEFORE DIGGING



**PA Power Switch**  
 PPUC "Shop For Electricity"



3/31/2020 - Wellsboro Electric Company has filed a Default Service Plan with the PA Public Utility Commission for the period June 1, 2021 through May 31, 2025. This plan is subject to Commission approval. [Click here to read the Customer Notice.](#)

To pay with a credit card, debit card or electronic check, call toll-free 1-844-886-9797. Or [Click Here to pay online.](#)

With the onset of COVID-19 and for the safety of our customers and employees, it was necessary for us to close our office to the public. Wellsboro Electric Company knows the health and financial challenges that are a result of COVID-19, that is why we are **waiving the third-party credit and debit card convenience fee until further notice.** To pay with a credit/debit card, call (844) 886-9797 or through [SmartHub](#). SmartHub is a free mobile application for Android and iOS smartphones and tablets through your app store. If you have never used SmartHub, you will need to register as a user.

You can mail your payment or leave your check or money order payment in the payment box by our front door. If you do not have your payment stub, be sure to include your name and address. As always, we are still here for you providing you with safe and reliable electric. If you need to discuss your account, have a concern or need to report an outage call us at 570-724-3516. Up to date information on COVID-19 can be found at the Center for Disease Control [cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov) or the World Health Organization at [who.int](http://who.int)

- [Wellsboro Electric's COVID-19 Response](#)

## Bill Print Message Samples

### Wellsboro Electric Message Board:

THE CORONAVIRUS HAS CAUSED MANY OF US TO STAY HOME. BE AWARE THIS MAY LEAD TO INCREASED USAGE WHICH CAN IMPACT YOUR ELECTRIC BILL. TO REDUCE YOUR CONSUMPTION, TRY THESE NO COST TIPS. LOWER THE THERMOSTAT A FEW DEGREES. OPEN CURTAINS OR BLINDS DURING THE DAY TO ALLOW NATURAL SUNLIGHT TO LIGHT YOUR HOME. TURN OFF AND UNPLUG COMPUTERS, DEVICES AND GAMING SYSTEMS WHEN NOT IN USE. WASH CLOTHES IN COLD WATER WHEN POSSIBLE AND CLEAN THE DRYER LINT FILTER AFTER EACH USE.

### Wellsboro Electric Message Board:

TAKE STEPS TO PROTECT YOURSELF. WASH YOUR HANDS WITH SOAP AND WATER FOR AT LEAST 20 SECONDS. AVOID TOUCHING YOUR FACE, NOSE AND MOUTH. PUT DISTANCE BETWEEN YOURSELF AND OTHER PEOPLE. CLEAN AND DISINFECT FREQUENTLY TOUCHED SURFACES. IF YOU FEEL ILL, HAVE A FEVER OR COUGH, AVOID CLOSE CONTACT WITH OTHERS.

### Wellsboro Electric Message Board:

THE LOW-INCOME HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (LIHEAP) HELPS LOW INCOME FAMILIES PAY THEIR HEATING BILLS THROUGH CASH OR CRISIS GRANTS. THE LIHEAP PROGRAM CLOSES APRIL 10, 2020. FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT THE TIOGA COUNTY ASSISTANCE OFFICE 570-724-4051 OR ONLINE [WWW.COMPASS.STATE.PA.US](http://WWW.COMPASS.STATE.PA.US)

Radio ad – April 2020

Seven Mountains Media WOGA – 92.3, 93.1 93.5 FM

Wellsboro Electric Company has been a part of the Wellsboro community since 1894. To comply with the Dept. of Health's COVID-19 guidelines, our office remains closed to the public and we are operating with a reduced staff. This does not change our commitment to you. We continue to provide you with safe and reliable electric and to respond to our customer's needs. Should you have any questions about your service or your need to discuss your bill, call us 24/7 at 570-724-3516. Stay safe and healthy.

# We're in This Together

To Our Customers:

The COVID-19 coronavirus is affecting all of us in a variety of ways.

Wellsboro Electric wants to reassure our customers that we are committed to keeping the power on for you as we work through this unprecedented time together. All of our employees will continue working to maintain services and restore any outages that may occur. Power outages can be reported by calling 570-724-3516.

We understand the hardship many of our members may face amid the COVID-19 outbreak. We encourage you to be mindful of electric use now that many of us are required to be at home. Practice energy conservation as much as possible. As we transition back to normal in the coming months, Wellsboro Electric will work with members who are behind on their electric bills as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak to offer payment arrangements. We are in this together.

Our lobby remains closed for the safety of our employees, customers and community, but we offer the following options for you to access your account or make payments:

- Payment by phone on the automated system, call 1-844-886-9797.
- Online, visit [www.wellsboroelectric.com](http://www.wellsboroelectric.com) and select the SmartHub option. You can also use the SmartHub app on your mobile device.

Wellsboro Electric has also temporarily eliminated the Convenience Fee charged to customers paying with a credit card or debit card. The suspension of the convenience fee remains in effect until our office reopens to the public.

Please be aware that scammers may surface during this time of uncertainty. We urge you to remain vigilant. Do not provide any personal or financial information to anyone over the phone or online unless you have initiated the transaction. If you receive a suspicious call from someone claiming to be a Wellsboro representative, please hang up and call our office at 570-724-3516.

For additional information and future updates, please visit our website at [www.wellsboroelectric.com](http://www.wellsboroelectric.com) and "like" Wellsboro Electric on Facebook.

