

8 Things You Can Do to Avoid Termination

1 Apply For Customer Assistance Programs (CAP)

All regulated gas and electric utilities offer a Customer Assistance Program, which provides customers with a bill discount and possible debt forgiveness if you make regular payments on your discounted bill.

If you are facing termination, enrolling in CAP for the first time will freeze the debt and allow you to work off the balance by making payments on your discounted bill.

If your income has dropped since you signed up for a low income program, you can ask the utility to recalculate your bill amount to be more affordable.

Confirmed low income utility customers cannot be shut off in winter (Dec 1-Mar 31). Enrolling in CAP is one way to be sure that the utility knows you are low income to prevent winter termination.

3 Inform the Utility If You Have a Protection from Abuse Order (PFA) or Other Court Order

Customers with a PFA or other court order with clear evidence of domestic violence have additional rights and protections:

- You cannot be held responsible for bills accrued in someone else's name.
- You may be able to get a longer, more generous payment agreement if you fall behind.
- You have a right to additional notice before termination.



2 Apply for Grant Assistance Programs

Apply for LIHEAP **every year** (November – April).

There are three components:

- Cash Grant
 - Provides cash assistance for electric or gas accounts
 - Amount of grant is based on income
- Crisis Grant
 - Provides cash assistance to prevent termination or help reconnect service that was previously terminated
 - Available **in addition** to the Cash Grant
- Crisis Interface / Weatherization
 - Will repair or replace a broken heating system
- Apply at www.compass.org or in person at your local County Assistance Office.

Each utility runs a Grant Assistance Program (Hardship Fund) as well.

- You can apply for Hardship Fund assistance once a year.
- The amount of assistance varies by program, but can be up to \$500 to resolve a past due balance.

4 Get a Medical Certificate

A medical certificate may prevent termination if someone in your home has a serious illness or a medical condition that would get worse if the gas, electricity, or water service is shut off.

- A medical certificate is a written document, signed by a doctor, physician assistant, or nurse practitioner, which tells the utility that you or someone in your household requires service for a medical condition.
- You can submit a new medical certificate every 30 days to prevent termination.
- You can submit up to three medical certificates (90 total days) even if you do not make any payments on your bill.
- You can submit unlimited medical certificates if you pay all current charges on your monthly bill on time and in full (not including past due balances from the months before your first medical certificate).

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5 Ask for a Payment Agreement

As a last resort, if you cannot otherwise get enough assistance by enrolling in a Universal Service Program (CAP), LIHEAP, or a Hardship Fund, you can request that the utility give you a payment agreement.

If you already have a payment agreement with the utility and you fall behind, ask for the “catch up” amount. The catch up amount may be lower than what the utility is currently asking.

7 Apply for Weatherization Assistance to Reduce Your Usage

Low income customers can access **free** weatherization services to help reduce the overall bill. This program is called the Low Income Usage Reduction Program (LIURP).

Assistance is available to home owners and renters (with landlord permission).

8 Consider Bankruptcy

If you owe a lot of money to a utility and you cannot get an affordable agreement, bankruptcy may be your best option to relieve you of debt and keep your utility services connected.

Call your local legal services provider for help.

6 Make a Complaint with the Public Utility Commission (PUC)

The PUC watches over the utilities.

You can make a complaint if:

- You think your bill is wrong
- The utility refuses to give you a payment agreement
- You are denied a medical certificate
- You were denied protections available because you have a PFA or other court order with evidence of domestic violence
- Your application for an assistance program (such as CAP or Hardship Funds) was denied
- You were not given proper notice of a termination
- Other claims against the utility may also be raised before the PUC

Call [1-800-692-7380](tel:1-800-692-7380) to make your complaint.

A utility cannot shut off your service while a complaint is pending before the PUC. However, you are responsible for paying undisputed bills while the PUC looks into your complaint.

Pennsylvania Utility Law Project

118 Locust Street
Harrisburg, PA 17101

Are you facing a utility shutoff?
Pennsylvania residents may be eligible for free help.

Search for your local legal aid program:
<https://palegalaid.net/legal-aid-providers-in-pa>

Or, call our toll-free hotline at [1-844-645-2500](tel:1-844-645-2500) or email us at utilityhotline@palegalaid.net

