



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION  
P.O. BOX 3265, HARRISBURG, PA 17105-3265

Nov. 1, 2017

Dear Utility CEO:

For 15 years, your company has supported the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission's annual "Prepare Now" campaign, focusing on households who may struggle with the cost of cold-weather energy bills, and we encourage and appreciate your continued support.

The 2017 "Prepare Now" campaign continues the focus on educating consumers about the availability of low-income programs; increasing awareness of ways to reduce winter heating costs including energy conservation; encouraging consumers to check electric and natural gas bills and supplier contracts; and informing consumers about PAPowerSwitch.com and PAGasSwitch.com as resources to shop for services.

It is imperative that we work together to inform consumers about the availability of programs to help them maintain or restore utility service. Some individuals and families may not be familiar with these services, while changing circumstances may trigger a need for assistance for households who may not have faced this situation before. For these reasons we urge all utilities to increase their outreach efforts to ensure that consumers receive information about any program for which they may be eligible, and work closely with payment-troubled consumers to minimize disputes as part of your obligation of good faith, honesty and fair dealing.

The size and reach of these programs is notable: In 2016, Pennsylvania utilities spent nearly \$398 million on customer assistance programs. Collectively, these utility programs assisted more than 313,000 electric customers and over 160,000 natural gas customers across the state, helping heat homes or pay energy bills through Customer Assistance Programs (CAPs), Low-Income Usage Reduction Programs (LIURPs) and other services. Low-income households may also be eligible for grants under the federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) which may be a companion to the utility-based programs.

As part of consumer outreach for the upcoming winter heating season, we ask you to consider the following activities:

- 1) Improve efforts to link consumers to programs that are available to help them restore and maintain service, such as CAP, LIHEAP and utility or local Hardship Funds.
- 2) Refer low-income consumers to CAP when they call to make payment arrangements, so they may also benefit from arrearage forgiveness if they qualify.
- 3) Restore service to low-income consumers upon enrollment into the company's CAP for the first time.
- 4) Exercise leniency when establishing payment arrangement plans for all consumers. Utilities have more discretion in making payment arrangements than does the Commission. When assessing whether to grant a payment arrangement, please consider changes in circumstances such as lost or reduced income, extended illness of the ratepayer or a household member, or increased household size and accompanying expenses.
- 5) Increase corporate donations to and fundraising for utility Hardship Funds and other local programs that assist consumers who need help paying their utility bills.

6) Review company procedures to ensure that automatic payments and online payments allow for consumer contributions to Hardship Funds.

7) Limit the number of terminations of confirmed low-income consumers by scaling back the company's termination program as cold weather and the winter termination moratorium approach. This includes reviewing termination and reconnection procedures to allow consumers who are making a good faith effort to pay their bills to keep utility service whenever possible.

8) Waive or reduce security deposits, reconnection fees and late payment charges if they are a barrier to restoration of service or establishing a payment arrangement. If a security deposit or reconnection fee is necessary, consider adding it to the consumer's bill instead of making it an initial condition of providing service.

9) Accept any combination of LIHEAP grant, crisis grant and Hardship Fund grant as sufficient funds to initiate or reconnect service for low-income consumers. If a consumer payment is also necessary, we encourage you to be as lenient as possible.

10) Provide customers with information about home heating safety and work to get consumers who have been "red tagged" the assistance or information needed to help in obtaining repairs to furnaces or heating systems. Refer low-income consumers to the LIHEAP crisis program for emergency repairs.

11) Promote the use of budget billing programs and third-party notification forms.

12) Provide information to consumers regarding how they can reduce their heating costs through conservation, including information on weatherization programs as well as cost-effective steps they can do themselves.

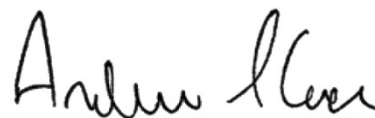
Please inform the Commission by Friday, Nov. 17, 2017, of your specific plan regarding the annual "Prepare Now" campaign. Also, feel free to offer any additional suggestions you may have that would improve our efforts. Send any comments to Sasha Oberheim in the Bureau of Consumer Services at [soberheim@pa.gov](mailto:soberheim@pa.gov).

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,



Gladys M. Brown  
Chairman



Andrew G. Place  
Vice Chairman



John F. Coleman Jr.  
Commissioner



David W. Sweet  
Commissioner