

## RESIDENTIAL UTILITY CUSTOMER PROTECTIONS

(Effective September 21, 2021)

### Established by the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (BPU)

*In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Governor Murphy signed a series of Executive Orders that established certain temporary rights to utility customers in the State.<sup>1</sup> Those specific rights are denoted by an asterisk (\*) in this document and are subject to change under the direction of the Governor.*

*If you have questions about these consumer protections, you should contact your utility company at the number on your bill. If you have a complaint about your utility company or if your services are in jeopardy of being shut off, you should call the BPU at 800-624-0241 for assistance. Note: The BPU regulates only investor owned utility companies.*

1. You have the right to utility service if you are a qualified applicant.
2. You have the right to budget billing or payment plans if you are an electric or gas customer.
3. You are entitled to at least one deferred payment plan within a twelve-month period. The deferred payment agreement offered to you by the utility company must be for at least a minimum term of twelve (12) months with no money down. Your utility company may not require a reconnection fee or deposit as a condition of continuing service, and late charges, interest and liens for past due amounts are not permitted during the grace period.\*
4. You have the right to apply for utility assistance programs which may include arrearage forgiveness. Learn more by calling your utility company or by calling 2-1-1. Information is also available online at [www.nj211.org/utility-assistance-programs](http://www.nj211.org/utility-assistance-programs).
5. Any disconnected gas, electric, and water customer who can demonstrate that application has been made to one of the following assistance programs, as applicable, shall be reconnected by that gas, electric, and water company upon request in order to obtain available benefits: Universal Service Fund; Low Income Home Energy Assistance; Payment Assistance for Gas and Electric, and Low Income Household Water Assistance.<sup>2</sup>
6. You have the right to have any complaint you make against your utility company handled promptly by that utility company.
7. You have the right to have your utility complaints and concerns investigated. Your service may not be terminated for non-payment of disputed charges during a BPU investigation.

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<sup>1</sup> All Executive Orders signed by Governor Murphy are published in the New Jersey Register and are also available online at: <https://nj.gov/infobank/eo/056murphy/>.

<sup>2</sup> The Low Income Household Water Assistance program is a new program designed for water utility customers that is currently being developed by the Department of Consumer Affairs ("DCA"). The DCA anticipates the program will be implemented in October 2021.

8. You have the right to have your meter tested free of charge once a year by your utility company if you suspect it is not working properly. For a \$5 fee, the meter test will be conducted under the supervision of the staff of the BPU.
9. You have the right to a written notice of termination from your utility company at least ten days prior to the discontinuance of service.
10. If you are a participant in an energy assistance program or a gas and/or electric customer having financial difficulties paying your bill, you can request the company enroll you in a budget plan based on your ability to pay. Provided you make good faith payments toward all reasonable bills for service, you have the right to gas and electric utilities service **from November 15 to March 15** without fear of termination of such service(s) under the Winter Termination Program.
11. You have the right to receive posted notice of any impending shutoff if you live in a multi-family dwelling. This notice must be posted in a common area and/or sent individually to occupants.
12. You have the right to have a "diversion of service" investigation if you suspect the level of consumption reflected in your utility bill is unexplainably high.
13. Service shall not be shut-off for non-payment of repair or merchandise charges, merchandise charges. No notice threatening discontinuance based on these charges may be given.
14. You have the option of having a deposit refund applied to your account as a credit or having the deposit refunded by separate check.
15. A utility may not impose late fees, interest, or liens on residential customer accounts due to late payments.
16. After December 31, 2021, residential gas, electric, and water and sewer utilities are permitted to inform customers that they are subject to termination of service due to nonpayment unless the customer is a participant of the Winter Termination Program.\*
17. After December 31, 2021, residential gas, electric, water, and sewer utilities are permitted to disconnect service due to nonpayment provided, however, a disconnection may occur at any time if it is to prevent a risk to public health or safety.\*
18. After December 31, 2021, residential service may be shut-off, after proper notice, only on Monday through Thursday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. A utility may not shut-off residential service on Friday, Saturday, Sunday, or a holiday or the day before a holiday, or if a valid medical emergency exists in your household.\*
19. You have the right to notification regarding any moratorium on rate increases.\*