

## RESIDENTIAL UTILITY CUSTOMER PROTECTIONS<sup>1</sup>

(Effective retroactively from January 1, 2022)

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

*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 a gas or electric utility 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 of twelve (12) months with no money down, unless you request a shorter payback period. 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. Any deferred payment plan offered by the utility company to you must comply with current law and regulations.
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, water, and sewer 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, water, and sewer 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> Erratum issued January 13, 2022

<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.

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 (10) days prior to the discontinuance of service.
10. If you are a participant in an energy assistance program or a gas, electric, water, and/or sewer 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 services if you are a participant under the Winter Termination Program. You have a right to water and sewer utility services through March 15, 2022.<sup>3</sup>
11. After March 15, 2022, residential gas, electric, water, and sewer utilities are permitted to inform customers that they are subject to termination of service due to non-payment.<sup>4</sup>
12. After March 15, 2022, 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.<sup>5</sup>
13. 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.
14. 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.

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<sup>3</sup> Electric and gas utility customers enrolled in the Winter Termination Program have a right to electric and gas utility service from November 15 to March 15 of each year in which they qualify under the program. Residential water and sewer utility customers have a right to water and sewer utility services through March 15, 2022. The Winter Termination Program will become available to qualified residential water and sewer utility customers beginning in the 2022-2023 winter season.

<sup>4</sup> This date applies to eligible participants of the WTP and residential water and sewer customers. For those residential gas and electric customers who are not currently part of the WTP, the date utilities are permitted to inform customers that they are subject to termination of service due to non-payment is January 1, 2022, subject to governing laws and regulations.

<sup>5</sup> This date applies to eligible participants of the WTP and residential water and sewer customers. For those residential gas and electric customers who are not currently part of the WTP, the date utilities are permitted to disconnect service due to nonpayment provided is January 1, 2022, subject to governing laws and regulations. However, a disconnection may occur at any time if it is to prevent a risk to public health or safety.

15. Service shall not be shut-off for non-payment of repair or merchandise charges. No notice threatening discontinuance based on these charges may be given.
16. You have the option of having a deposit refund applied to your account as a credit or having the deposit refunded by separate check.
17. A utility may not impose late fees, interest, or liens on residential customer accounts due to late payments.
18. 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.