



NEWS RELEASE

STATE EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER

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For more information contact:
[Matt Helms](#)
517-284-8300

Leaders Urge Michiganders Struggling Financially to be Proactive, Seek Help with Utility Bills as State, Energy Providers Offer Assistance

LANSING, MICH. State officials today urged Michiganders to be proactive if they're struggling to pay their utility bills by reaching out to their energy providers and seeking financial assistance if they've lost a job or their income has dropped amid the coronavirus pandemic.

State leaders encourage anyone facing financial distress because of COVID-19 to:

- Contact your utility or propane supplier to ask what kind of protections, funding, flexible payment options, or energy saving tools and resources are available.
- Call 211 or go to www.mi211.org for information about getting help paying your utility bill or how to contact agencies that may assist you with your energy bill.
- Apply for State Emergency Relief (SER) directly through [MI Bridges](#) for bill payment assistance or call 855-275-6424. You can also get assistance with the applications process by calling 211 to be referred to a Michigan Energy Assistance Program grantee that can help.
- Apply for a Home Heating Credit. Visit the [Michigan Department of Treasury's website](#) to see if you qualify. Even though this funding is distributed by the Department of Treasury, you do not need to pay taxes or wait for a tax return to receive this credit, so apply now if you are eligible. For more information, read the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) Home Heating Credit [consumer tip](#).

Utilities across the state have agreed to pause service disconnections low-income and senior customers through June 1, 2020, while many businesses are closed and residents are under Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's extended [Stay Home, Stay Safe order](#).

"Nobody should have to worry about how they're going to pay their utility bills during a crisis," Governor Whitmer said. "My administration is committed to ensuring Michigan families have the support they need during this time. I urge everyone who is struggling to pay their bills to reach out for help. We will get through this together."

The MPSC on April 15 issued an order directing regulated electric and natural gas utilities to file affirmations that certain minimum customer protections were in place:

- Suspending disconnections for Michigan's most vulnerable populations, low-income and senior customers, through June 1, and waiving late fees for eligible low-income customers receiving energy assistance.

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- Allowing for customers exposed to, infected by or quarantined because of COVID-19 to be eligible for a 30-day medical hold to avoid a disconnection of service.
- Waiving deposits and reconnection fees for low-income customers, seniors and customers experiencing financial hardship related to COVID-19 and seeking restoration of electric or gas service.
- Extending access to and availability of flexible payment plans to customers financially impacted by COVID-19, and providing customer assistance personnel with the resources necessary to connect customers to available financial assistance and social service agencies.

As of April 28, all investor-owned utilities and all but one rural electric cooperative had filed statements affirming protections. Midwest Energy and Communications had not filed an affirmation, but the MPSC understands it has adopted customer protections.

The MPSC's regulatory jurisdiction does not include municipally owned utilities, but Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel noted that municipal utilities in Michigan have agreed to extended customer protections and assistance and have been coordinating closely with the MPSC on these and other issues during the COVID-19 emergency.

"Municipal utilities have stepped up to make sure their customers are protected during this public health emergency and I am grateful for their efforts," Nessel said. "These entities are offering assistance to their fellow Michiganders during a challenging time, and as our state works through this crisis each day, it is becoming stronger and more united through collaborative, commonsense efforts like these."

MPSC Chairman Sally Talberg noted customers need to notify their utilities of financial difficulties or seek out assistance directly through the [Michigan Department of Health and Human Services](#) (MDHHS), [211](#) or [social service agencies](#). The MPSC is partnering with utilities and social service agencies on an outreach campaign including public service announcements, bill inserts, and other efforts to spread the word about resources available for those in need.

"Financial assistance is available for those struggling, and it is important that customers not wait to seek out help with paying their utility bills," Talberg said. "Utilities have special protections in place right now due to COVID-19, but customers still need to contact their utility and apply for assistance while it is available."

"You can get help based on what you're earning now, so you may be eligible if you recently lost your job or were furloughed," said MDHHS Director Robert Gordon. "We are doing all we can to help Michiganders through the extraordinary challenges of this time."

Visit www.michigan.gov/mpsc for utility contact information and consumer tips.

Information around this outbreak is changing rapidly. The latest information is available at www.michigan.gov/coronavirus and www.cdc.gov/coronavirus.

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