Dear Sir or Madam:

We are sending this letter because you called for help with utilities. We have received more requests than we can handle. For this season, we can only help you if your utility service has been shut off or if your house will be sold at Sheriff’s Sale because of unpaid water bills.

The steps below are the steps we take to prevent shut off and get more affordable bills for low-income customers. **We urge you to take steps to avoid shut off. After shut off happens, you may have to pay more money to get utilities, including a reconnection fee and possibly a deposit.**

**Important First Steps**

1. **Show the utility you are low-income.**
   - You can get a Shut Off Notice cancelled when you sign up for the utility’s low-income program (PECO’s CAP Rate, PGW’s CRP or Water Revenue’s WRAP).
   - If your income has dropped since you signed up for a low-income program, you can ask for a lower bill and/or a payment agreement. Take proof of your income to the utility.
   - Low-income utility customers cannot be shut off in winter (Dec 1-Mar 31). Show the utility proof of your low-income.

2. **Get a Payment Agreement.**
   - Ask the utility if you can get a payment agreement.
   - If you already got a payment agreement and fell behind, ask for the “catch up” amount. The catch-up amount could be lower than what the utility is now demanding.
   - Enter a payment agreement or catch up on a payment agreement to cancel the Shut Off Notice. But PGW will not give a payment agreement on overdue CRP bills.

3. **Apply for Grant Assistance**
   - Call the Utility Emergency Services Fund (UESF) at (215) 972-5170 and ask if they have funding available.
   - Apply for LIHEAP if it is available.

4. **Get Medical Certification.** Show that someone in your home has a serious illness or medical condition that would get worse if the gas, electricity or water service is shut off. Ask the utility for a Medical Certification.
   - For PGW or PECO, give the utility your doctor’s fax number. The utility will fax the form to your doctor. You can get a 30-day hold on the shut-off. If you do not pay at least the current monthly charges since the first medical certification, you can renew it for only two more 30-day periods.
   - For Water Revenue, ask your doctor to write a short note on office stationary that has your name, address, and the name of the person in your home who is ill or has the medical condition that will get worse if water service is shut off. This Medical Certification is for 30 days. It can be renewed one time in a 12 month period.
   - Try to make a payment plan for the unpaid bills before the Medical Certification expires.

5. **Contact the utility if you have a Protection from Abuse Order (PFA).** If you have a PFA, you may be able to obtain additional payment options from PECO and PGW. Contact the utility and let them know that you have a PFA. Ask for a stay on shut off and ask for additional payment options.
6. Make a Complaint with the Public Utility Commission (PUC).

- The PUC watches over the utilities. You can make a complaint if you have a PGW or PECO Shut Off Notice and you think the bill is wrong. You can make a complaint if you have a Shut Off Notice and the utility refuses to give you a payment agreement. You can also make a complaint if you have a Shut Off Notice and the utility refuses to accept a Medical Certification.
- Call 1-800-692-7380 to make your complaint.
- The shut-off will not happen while the PUC looks into your complaint. You are responsible for paying undisputed bills while the PUC looks into your complaint.

Other Possible Options

1. For PECO customers. Some PECO customers have more options.
   - CAP Rate A: If you are on CAP Rate B (for very low income at or below 25% of the federal poverty level; for example, with less than $315 a month for 2 people) and have a Shut Off Notice, fax a letter to PECO CARES at 215-841-5365. Ask to be put on CAP Rate A to get a bill as low as $12 a month.
   - Six Month Medical Certificate: If you are chronically or terminally ill, you may qualify for a medical certificate for 6 months, not just 30 days. Fax a letter to PECO CARES at 215-841-5365. Ask for the 6-month medical form and a hold on Shut Off.
   - Health Usage Discount: People with a CAP rate who use electricity for medical equipment may get a discount off their whole bill, not just 650 kWh. Contact PECO’s Low Income Usage Reduction Program (LIURP) at 1-800-675-0222 and ask for an energy audit, the health usage discount, and a hold on Shut Off.
   - Weatherization: Getting a weatherization audit scheduled could put a 30 day hold on shut off and provide you with a payment arrangement to catch up on your bill. Contact PECO’s Low Income Usage Reduction Program (LIURP) at 1-800-675-0222 and ask for an energy audit.

2. Ask for Help From Elected Officials. Elected officials know people at the utilities who may help in special situations. Consider asking your City Councilperson, State Senator or State Representative for help.

3. Bankruptcy. If you owe a lot of money to a utility and you cannot get an affordable agreement, you may want to file for bankruptcy. You can ask CLS to refer you to the Consumer Bankruptcy Assistance Project. You may also find your own lawyer to avoid delay.

If Shut Off Happens

If your utility service is shut off or if you receive legal papers stating that your home will be sold at Sheriff’s Sale because of unpaid water/sewer bills, you can come to CLS for intake. The CLS office at 1424 Chestnut Street (Center City) is open for new clients on Monday through Friday, from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon. The CLS office at 1410 W. Erie Avenue (at Broad & Erie Streets in North Philadelphia) is open for new utility clients on Tuesday and Thursday, from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon.

If you get another shut off notice or have questions about this letter, please call our Utility Hotline at 215-981-3746. Our assistance to you is limited to the advice in this letter, any file you have with us on utility issues is being closed.

Sincerely,

The Energy Unit of Community Legal Services