



COVID-19: Protections for Utility Customers

FACT SHEET

April 2021

Last year, state regulators and consumer advocates negotiated protections for utility customers having a hard time affording their bills. This coalition has since regrouped to negotiate post-moratorium issues. With a moratorium on disconnections ending April 1, it is vital people contact their utilities to learn what protections are available. Here is what you need to know:

Disconnections

Utilities will begin sending out disconnection notices as of April 1, starting with customers who owe 150 percent or more of the average arrearage (amount owed) as of Jan. 31, 2021.

At the end of April, disconnection notices will go to customers at 100 percent of the average arrearage, with disconnections starting May 1. All other notices will go out in June.

Customers at 300 percent of the federal poverty level and below will be protected from disconnection until June 30 but must call their utility and set up a payment plan. **Customers MUST call their utility to prevent disconnection.**

Deferred Payment Arrangements (DPAs)

For ComEd, Ameren, North Shore Gas and Peoples Gas customers: Any customer who calls their utility can get on an 18-month deferred payment arrangement (DPA) for the amount owed not covered by other financial assistance (see sections on LIHEAP and Bill Payment Assistance). Customers up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level can get the 18-month DPA for 0 percent down. All other customers must put 10 percent down. All financial assistance subsequently received will immediately apply to the amount owed and the customer can call back to renegotiate their DPA on the extended 18-month terms until June 30. **Customers can self-certify income level and will not need to provide documentation to get those protections.**

Nicor will provide 24-month DPAs to all customers that call through July 31.

Customers who do not make a payment or contact the utility to enter into a DPA after receiving a disconnection notice will be eligible for disconnection.

Reconnection

Before July 10, 2021, customers up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level can reconnect by paying 25 percent of their arrearage. Customers above 300 percent of the federal poverty level would be required to pay the entire balance to get reconnected, but they may qualify for other financial assistance.

Bill Payment Assistance (BPAs)

Bill Payment Assistance is financial assistance provided by your utility. Each utility's BPA provisions are slightly different. Customers that received BPA funds in the fall are eligible to receive additional funds, as described below:

- **ComEd:** Customers up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level can get up to \$500, or possibly more for reconnection assistance (depending on how quickly funds are depleted).
- **Peoples Gas and North Shore Gas:** Customers up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level can get up to \$500 or, if used for reconnection assistance, up to \$1,000.
- **Ameren:** Customers up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level can get up to \$400 for electric bills and \$300 for gas bills.
- **Nicor:** If a customer has a balance more than \$300 outstanding for at least 60 days, they qualify to get up to \$500 in assistance. Total assistance cannot exceed \$800 if the customer previously used BPA.

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program

If you need financial assistance to help pay energy bills, call the Help Illinois Families Hotline, 1-833-711-0374, to learn about the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) before an April 16 online pre-application deadline.

After April 16, call the LIHEAP Hotline, at 1-877-411-9276. The final application deadline is May 31, 2021, or until funds run out. During the pandemic, the requirements have changed to allow more people to receive assistance.

Contact Your Utility

Phone numbers for major utilities in Illinois:

Ameren Illinois– 1-800-755-5000

ComEd– 1-800-334-7661

Nicor Gas– 1-888-642-6748

North Shore Gas– 1-866-556-6004

Peoples Gas– 1-866-556-6001

Utilities Inc.– 1-800-831-2359

MidAmerican– 1-888-427-5632

Mount Carmel – 1-618-262-5151

Liberty Gas– 1-855-644-8134

Consumers Gas– 1-618-382-4158

Illinois Gas – 1-866-705-7291