



CITIZENS UTILITY BOARD

Fighting for Illinois Consumers

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, Oct. 14, 2020

CONTACT: Jim Chilsen

312-263-4282 (o); 312-513-1784 (c)

CUB TO CONSUMERS STRUGGLING WITH THEIR BILLS: CONTACT YOUR UTILITY

The Citizens Utility Board (CUB) on Wednesday urged Illinois consumers having difficulty paying their utility bills during the pandemic to contact their utility companies to take advantage of unprecedented consumer protections available to them.

“Anybody struggling to pay their bills during the pandemic should immediately contact their utility to find out what protections are available, and to set up a plan to prevent disconnection,” CUB Executive Director David Kolata said. “These protections are available for a limited time, and only for customers who call their utility and say they are experiencing financial hardship because of the pandemic.”

In June, the Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) approved landmark consumer protections negotiated by a coalition of consumer advocates and these major utilities: Ameren Illinois, Aqua Illinois, ComEd, Illinois American, Nicor Gas, North Shore Gas, Peoples Gas and Utilities Inc.

Kolata stressed that the following protections are available **only to customers who call and state they are experiencing hardship due to the pandemic:**

A moratorium on disconnections. The utilities have agreed to extend the moratorium through March 31, 2021 for all consumers who qualify for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) OR those who call the utility and say they are financially impacted by COVID-19. (**Note:** For most utilities, this is not a blanket moratorium. It will only be given to individuals who call.)

Waiving deposits. Until Dec. 26, utilities must waive deposits connected to late payment or non-payment, arrearages, or credit-related issues for customers experiencing financial hardship. Also, utilities will not report late payments and nonpayment for active customers to credit bureaus and reporting agencies.

Consumer-friendly payment plans. Until Dec. 26, utilities are required to offer longer Deferred Payment Arrangements (DPAs)—plans that help people pay off debt with a utility. DPAs for customers who are LIHEAP-eligible or express financial hardship will not require a down payment and will be extended to 24 months.

Reminder: No documented proof of hardship is required to qualify for these consumer protections. But people must call their utilities and state they are experiencing hardship.

-more-



CITIZENS UTILITY BOARD

Fighting for Illinois Consumers

The utilities also have set up a Bill Payment Assistance Program that offers a certain amount of debt forgiveness for eligible utility customers who apply. Each utility's program will differ in terms of available funding, the amount allotted to each customer and the way it is administered. CUB urged consumers to ask their utility companies about the Bill Payment Assistance Program.

Contact numbers for the major utilities offering these consumer protections:

- **Ameren Illinois** – 1-800-755-5000
- **Aqua Illinois** – 1-877-987-2782
- **ComEd** – 1-800-334-7661
- **Illinois American Water** – 1-800-422-2782
- **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

To read a fact sheet on the consumer protections available to consumers, go to **CUBHelpCenter.com**.

###

*CUB is Illinois' leading nonprofit utility watchdog. Created by the Illinois Legislature, CUB opened its doors in 1984 to represent the interests of residential and small-business utility customers. Since then, it has saved consumers more than \$20 billion by helping block rate hikes, secure refunds, and fight for clean, low-cost energy. For more information, call CUB's Consumer Hotline, **1-800-669-5556**, or visit its website, www.CitizensUtilityBoard.org.*