

## HEATING UTILITY SHUT-OFFS

Consumers who are facing utility shut-offs may contact the Attorney General's Consumer Hotline at (617) 727-8400 for information and/or mediation services to assist in resolving the situation. Consumers may also wish to consult a private attorney, or seek other legal representation.

### Home Heating

Under certain circumstances, a heating utility is not allowed to shut off the heat, even for non-payment. These circumstances are:

- Senior households where everyone in the household is age 65 or older;
- Low-income families with infants, under the age of 12 months and the service was not terminated for non-payment before the birth of the child;
- People with serious illnesses who cannot afford to pay their utility bills;
- Tenants whose landlords are responsible for utility bills;
- Low-income people who would be without heat during the winter.

To apply, contact the utility provider's customer service department and request a utility protection form to complete and return to the company. The utility may request verification of the protection category, such as a child's birth certificate, written proof of illness from a physician, and/or proof of inability to pay based upon income.

When applying, customers should track their date of contact with the utility company requesting protection, and keep copies of any correspondence (forms, letters) with the utility company. In the event that the request is denied, customers may appeal the decision by contacting the Consumer Division of the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities at 1-800-392-6066, or by email at [consumer.complaint@state.ma.us](mailto:consumer.complaint@state.ma.us).

### Winter Moratorium

There is also a winter moratorium in place every year from November 15 to March 15. During those months, gas and electric companies cannot shut off service because of inability to pay. This moratorium does not apply however, if service was shut off for non-payment before November 15. Utility charges will continue to be applied during this period and the customer will still owe the utility company for the provided service. Consumers can still pay what they can afford during this time and should contact their utility provider to negotiate a payment plan to cover these accrued heating charges.

### Water Service or Other Government-Provided Utilities

For billing disputes with a local water company or other Massachusetts city, town, or regional public service provider, consumers should contact the local city or town hall or other government utility provider directly.