



# KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

## protect your household from heating shutoffs

### Eligibility for Key Protections Against Shutoff

PROTECTION	REQUIREMENT
<b>ELDERLY</b>	<p>ALL household members [except for minor children in the care of the elder(s)] must be 65 or older.</p> <p>Household must notify company.</p> <p>NO proof of financial hardship required.</p>
<b>SERIOUS ILLNESS</b>	<p>Must show that someone (customer or family member) is seriously ill by submitting a letter from a doctor, nurse practitioner, physician's assistant, or Board of Health.</p> <p>Must be on the discount rate or demonstrate financial hardship.</p> <p>Serious illness letter must be renewed every 90 days or every 180 days for a chronic illness.</p>
<b>WINTER MORATORIUM</b>	<p>Applies to gas (if used to heat) or electricity (if used to operate furnace, boiler, thermostats or heating controls).</p> <p>Runs from November 15th thru March 15th.</p> <p>Must demonstrate financial hardship or be on the discount rate.</p>
<b>INFANT</b>	<p>An infant under the age of 12 months must be living in household.</p> <p>Must submit birth certificate, baptismal certificate or other reasonable proof of age.</p> <p>Must demonstrate financial hardship or be on the discount rate.</p>

## APPLY TO ABCD FUEL ASSISTANCE FOR HELP WITH PAYING HEATING BILLS FROM NOVEMBER 1ST THROUGH APRIL 30TH!

- **Residents of Boston, Brookline, and Newton** can reach ABCD Fuel Assistance at: 178 Tremont Street, Boston MA. Call us at 617.357.6012 TTY: 617.423.9215
- **Residents of Everett, Malden, Medford, Melrose, Stoneham, Winchester, and Woburn** can reach ABCD Fuel Assistance at: 18 Dartmouth Street, Malden MA. Call us at 781.322.6284

### HEATING EMERGENCIES

- **In addition to contacting ABCD's Energy Department, you can call:**  
The United Way: 800.231.4377 or dial 211  
The Salvation Army: 617.542.5420



## CHECKLIST OF KEY PROTECTIONS FOR UTILITY CONSUMERS

**SERIOUS ILLNESS:** If there is ANY person in the household (adult or child) who has a serious illness utilities cannot shut off (and must restore) utility service. An illness can be physical (pneumonia, etc.) or mental (depression, bipolar, ADHD), short-term (e.g. flu) or long-term (e.g. cancer). The utility company does NOT get to decide what a serious illness is. All you need is a letter from a doctor, nurse practitioner, physician's assistant, or Board of Health. A phone call from the doctor to the company is acceptable only if later followed by a letter. You should expect and demand that utility service be restored the same day (at worst, the next day) whenever you document a serious illness by phone, fax or letter from a doctor. You will also need to document that you have a "financial hardship" in paying bills. Any client who receives LIHEAP (Fuel Assistance) is automatically presumed to have a financial hardship.

**CHILD UNDER 12 MONTHS:** If there is a child under the age of 12 months in the household, a utility company cannot terminate service and must restore service that has been terminated if the child was in the home at or prior to the time of termination. The child's age can be documented by birth certificate, baptismal certificate, or any other reasonable means. "Financial hardship" must also be shown.

**WINTER MORATORIUM:** Utilities cannot terminate service that is heat-related (meaning natural gas, if used to heat the home or electricity if the tenant pays for heat because electricity is needed for furnace/boiler controls) between November 15th and March 15th, if the household has a "financial hardship." The date is often extended to April 1st or April 30th.

**ELDERLY CLIENTS:** If every person (with the exception of minor children in the care of the elder(s) in the household) is age 65 or over, the company needs explicit approval of the DPU (Department of Public Utilities) to terminate service, which is almost never granted. ALWAYS notify the company if everyone in the household is age 65 or over. If service has been terminated, it should be restored.

**DISCOUNT RATES:** ALWAYS determine if you are on the low income discount rate. When in doubt, call the company to see if you are on the rate. It's very easy for the company to check. Discount rates are mandated by law and all companies have them. Clients on Fuel Assistance are eligible for the discount and will usually get the discount automatically via the Fuel Assistance agency notifying the utility. Clients on TAFDC, Food Stamps, MassHealth, WIC and other income-test programs are also eligible, but may have to apply to the utility directly. Some of these will be automatically enrolled. Find discount rate applications on the web.

**PAYMENT PLANS:** ALL are entitled to PAYMENT PLANS. This allows someone who is behind on their bills to spread the payments over several months. If you have not yet been terminated, the company MUST offer a payment plan of AT LEAST four months. Some payment plans go 12 months or longer. If you have been terminated, the rules are not as favorable, and are strictest during the fall (because the winter moratorium is about to begin and companies are most aggressive in trying to shut off service). ALWAYS insist on a payment plan that you can afford.

**ARREARAGE FORGIVENESS/MANAGEMENT:** Where utility debt is forgiven while adhering to a structured payment plan. For more information on this plan, call your utility: National Grid GAS 1-800- 233-5325 or EVERSOURCE 1-866-315-2496.

**CROMWELL WAIVER:** You cannot be denied services because of a past due balance from an old address when you request service at a new address. If you are denied service, request a "Cromwell Waiver" from the utility. A process will follow where you will be obliged to set up a payment plan.

**UTILITY COMPLIANCE:** If you have trouble getting a utility to comply with any of the protections or programs described above, call the DPU's (Department of Public Utilities) Consumer Division at 1-877- 886-5066. The front-line phone representative should intervene on your behalf. If not, ask to speak to his or her supervisor.