

Talking Points When Negotiating with Utility Companies

The following talking points are intended to help you confidently navigate conversations with your utility company.

While on the phone, remember to:

- Take notes.
- Ask for confirmation numbers and reference numbers whenever possible.
- Try to stay calm and repeat yourself when necessary.

If you experience issues, or cannot reach a satisfactory resolution, you can escalate your concern to the Department of Public Service (DPS) or seek assistance from your elected representative's office or PULP.

Requesting a Credit/Collections Hold

What is it: This is a temporary hold to prevent service interruptions while you seek financial assistance.

Talking Points:

1. **Contact Your Utility Company:** Reach out to the customer service department, ideally before your service is disconnected, or your bill is sent to collections.
 2. **Briefly Explain Your Situation:** Let them know that you are experiencing financial hardship and are seeking financial assistance, such as HEAP or Emergency HEAP.
 3. **Request a Hold or Extension:** If you have already applied for financial assistance or in the process of applying, ask for a temporary hold on collections until the funds are available.
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Requesting a Deferred Payment Agreement (DPA)- Minimum or Negotiated

What is it: A Deferred Payment Agreement or DPA is a payment arrangement that allows customers with past-due balances to pay off their arrears in installments while keeping their service active. Customers pay their current bills along with a portion of their debt.

Talking Points:

1. **Contact Your Utility Company:** Reach out to the customer service department as soon as you realize you cannot pay the full amount.

2. **Request a Deferred Payment Agreement:** Briefly explain the change in your financial situation, such as unexpected emergency expenses, and request a DPA or a payment plan for your past due balance.
 3. **Negotiate Terms and Propose a Realistic Payment Plan:** Payment plans can often be customized to fit your financial situation, with some allowing for as low as \$0 down and \$10 per month. Make sure to communicate what monthly installment is realistic for you to pay in addition to your current monthly bill.
 4. **Provide Financial Information:** Be prepared to supply information about your income, assets, and expenses to determine your eligibility for a payment plan.
 5. **Request a Confirmation Number and Sign the Agreement:** Collect a confirmation number for the agreement. Both you and your utility provider must sign the agreement for it to be valid.
 6. **Maintain Payments:** It is important to pay your monthly bill and payment agreement on time. If you default, you may not be entitled to another minimum payment agreement.
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Requesting a Meter Test (Suspected Overbilling or Faulty Meter)

What is it: A meter test is an assessment of a utility meter to ensure it is measuring usage accurately. You can request a meter test if you believe the equipment may be faulty, if your usage appears unusually high, or to confirm accuracy after any upgrades to equipment.

Talking Points:

1. **Prepare Information:** Before calling your utility, have your account number and recent high bill ready.
 2. **Request an Investigation:** Clearly explain that your bill is unexpectedly high and that you suspect your meter may be inaccurate. Specifically request that a “meter test” be completed to verify that your meter is accurately reflecting your consumption.
 3. **Dispute Charges:** Clearly state that you are formally disputing the bill amount to prevent any service disconnection. Ask if you will receive a refund or credit for any past overcharges if the meter is found to be faulty.
 4. **Get a Confirmation Number:** Request a confirmation number for future follow-up.
 5. **Escalate if Necessary:** If the agent is unhelpful, request to speak with someone else or inform them that you will file a formal complaint with the Department of Public Service (DPS).
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Requesting a Shared Meter Investigation

What is it: A shared meter investigation is an inspection used to determine whether your meter is measuring energy consumption from areas outside your immediate residence. You can request a shared meter investigation if you notice that your meter appears to be connected to other units or common areas, if your meter continues to run even when your electricity or gas is turned off, or if your bill is unusually high during times you are not at home.

Talking Points:

1. **Contact your Utility:** Call your utility provider to report suspected shared usage.
2. **Request an Inspection:** Specifically ask for a “shared meter inspection” to verify if you are paying for utilities outside of your apartment.
3. **Request a Timeline:** Ask how long your utility expects the investigation to take and ask how they intend to notify you of the results.
4. **Dispute Charges:** Clearly state that you are formally disputing the amount on the bill. Request a credit/collections hold be placed on your account while the investigation is ongoing. Ask about what steps will be taken if a shared meter is discovered and how the utility plans to address any overcharges made to your account.
5. **Get a Confirmation Number:** Request a confirmation number for future follow-up.
6. **Results:** If you are not satisfied with the utility’s determination, you may file a complaint with the Department of Public Service (DPS).

These talking points provide guidance for different utility-related issues. If the utility company refuses to cooperate or does not provide a reasonable resolution, you should file a complaint with the **Department of Public Service at 800-342-3377** or, in emergency cases, call **800-342-3355**.