

Do You Have A Dispute?



Frequently Asked Questions

about how the
**PUBLIC SERVICE
COMMISSION**
can help you with utility
problems

Which services are regulated by the Public Service Commission (PSC)?

The PSC regulates intrastate gas, electric, landline telephone, steam heating, for-profit water and sewer companies, and certain taxicabs and common carriers that transport passengers within Maryland. The PSC also license gas and electric suppliers. However, the rates charged by suppliers are not regulated. Additionally, the PSC does not regulate oil or propane providers; wireless telecommunication carriers; VOIP, Internet or broadband service.

Whom should I contact if I have a dispute with a utility or supplier?

You must first contact the utility or supplier to try to resolve the problem. The company is required by law to investigate your inquiry and provide you with an oral or written response.

You should keep a record of the names, telephone numbers, and dates of all conversations you have with the company's representatives. If you are unable to resolve your dispute initially, it may be helpful for you to speak with a supervisor.

What if I disagree with the utility or supplier's response?

If you are dissatisfied with the company's determination, you may submit your dispute in writing to the PSC within 7 days of receiving the utility's final answer. *If you have received a turn-off notice, you should call the PSC at: (410) 767-8028 or (800) 492-0474.* The PSC may require you to follow-up in writing.

What information should I provide?

The PSC will send you an easy-to-complete questionnaire form, or you may send us a letter or complete our on-line complaint form www.psc.state.md.us/psc/info/complaintFront.htm. Our telephone numbers and addresses are on the back of this brochure.

When sending us a letter or E-mail, you must provide:

- your name,
- mailing address,
- service address (if different),
- telephone number,
- name of utility or supplier, and
- your account number(s).

Additionally, explain your dispute in detail describing the efforts you have made to resolve your dispute with the company. You should note why you disagree with the company's final determination and suggest how you want the matter resolved. Attach copies of all relevant supporting documents (bills, letters, leases, canceled checks, etc.).

Who should file the dispute?

The dispute should be filed by one of the persons whose name appears on the company account or bill. The PSC may accept a dispute filed by a relative or friend of the account holder under certain circumstances (e.g. if the account holder is ill) provided we are able to verify that person's authority to act on behalf of the account holder. **The PSC may refuse to accept a dispute filed by a person who is not the customer of record or does not have proper authority to act on behalf of the customer of record.**

Am I required to pay my bill if I have a dispute?

You are required to pay the "undisputed" portion of your bill while the matter is under investigation by the utility or the PSC. In other words, if you used the company's services, but dispute some of the charges, you must pay for the services that you do not dispute. For example, if you believe that you were overcharged for a metered service (such as gas or electric) on your January bill, you still must pay your December and February bills and any other undisputed bills. Or, if you dispute certain long distance telephone charges, you must still pay for your local phone service and any long distance charges that are not in dispute.

Can the utility disconnect my service if I file a dispute?

Even if you have filed a dispute, a utility may disconnect your service for the following reasons:

- failure to pay the undisputed portion of the bill,
- a hazardous condition exists on the property,
- you have tampered with the utility's equipment,
- you obtained service without authorization, or
- your use of equipment adversely affects the utility's equipment or service to other customers.

What happens after I file a dispute?

Your dispute will be assigned to a Utility Affairs Specialist (UAS), who will provide you with a written acknowledgment of receipt. You will be given a case number, which should be referred to whenever communicating about your dispute.

The UAS will obtain information from the utility or supplier and may request additional information from you. In certain situations, the UAS may ask the company's representative to contact you directly to expedite the process. If your dispute involves a technical question, it may be referred to PSC technical staff.

As part of the investigation, the UAS will review all information, consider the applicable statutes, regulations and tariffs, and arrive at a determination regarding your dispute. For all written complaints, both you and the company will be given a written summary of the UAS' findings and conclusions concerning the appropriate resolution to your dispute.

Do I have a right to appeal the initial determination?

You or the company may request further review of the UAS' determination by submitting a written request to the Assistant Manager of External Relations within ten (10) days of receiving the UAS' final written summary.

A request for further review must include the following:

1. an explanation of the need for further review,
2. the action or relief requested, and
3. new or additional documentation or information.

The Assistant Manager will review the file and may investigate further or schedule an informal conference to mediate or resolve the dispute. Either party may appeal the Assistant Manager's disposition directly to the Commission within ten (10) days.

Can you help me pay my utility bill?

The PSC *does not* provide financial assistance, but we may contact the utility to mediate payment arrangements or request an extension when appropriate. Low-income utility customers should contact the Office of Home Energy Program (OHEP) at (800) 352-1446 and/or the Fuel Fund of Central Maryland at (410) 821-3022 for help with heating bills. In addition, your utility may refer you to local charities that can provide assistance.

How do I obtain more information?

Requests for general information about the PSC or a regulated utility should be sent by U.S. mail or fax (*see back of brochure*) to the PSC's Office of External Relations. Briefly describe the type of information you are seeking, and provide your name, mailing address and a daytime telephone number.

Copies of official documents (such as PSC Orders, case file materials, utility tariffs, etc.) may be obtained from the PSC's web site or by calling the PSC Docket Room at (410) 767-8080. You will be required to pay for copying and postage in advance for tariff filings and documents from case files. You may also call or write the PSC's Office of External Relations to obtain free consumer information on gas, electric and telephone matters.

By Internet :



Visit us on the Internet at www.psc.state.md.us/psc to use our On-Line Complaint Form

By mail:



Maryland Public Service Commission
Office of External Relations
William D. Schaefer Tower
6 St. Paul Street
Baltimore, MD 21202-6806

By telephone:



Toll-Free: (800) 492-0474
(In Maryland Only)

Local: (410) 767-8028

Md. Relay (TT/Voice)
Service: (800) 735-2258

Fax: (410) 333-6844