GOVERNOR HOCHUL WARNS NEW YORKERS ABOUT RISING ENERGY COSTS AND DIRECTS UTILITIES TO WORK WITH CONSUMERS

Electric & Gas Utilities Directed to Work with Consumers Facing High Energy Bills

Enhanced Statewide Campaign to Connect Low-Income Consumers with Assistance Programs

Governor Kathy Hochul today announced that the state’s utility regulator has now sent letters to all of New York’s major electric and gas utilities requiring them to increase their outreach and education efforts with New Yorkers on the continuing surge in energy supply prices and the impact it will have on utility bills, in light of the national increases to utility bills we are seeing as a result of the rising cost of natural gases. In addition, Governor Hochul launched an enhanced statewide campaign to increase relief efforts for low-income customers to access millions of dollars in aid that are available.

"The extreme utility bill increases all of us are seeing are having a serious impact on our household budgets, and in response we are taking action," Governor Hochul said. "I have directed the Department of Public Service to ensure all the major electric and gas utilities in the state work with customers, and in particular, our most vulnerable residents to protect them from volatile pricing and educate them about resources available to them."

The cost of natural gas, which is used to heat homes and generate electricity, continues to rise sharply resulting in a significant increase — sometimes more than doubling — of the supply component of customer electric and/or natural gas bills as compared to prior months. These bill increases are being driven by a global increase in natural gas commodity prices due to higher domestic usage because of colder-than-normal weather, increased economic activity, and increased international demand for natural gas.

On February 11, 2022, the Public Service Commission sent a letter to Con Edison, the state’s largest utility, urging it to review its billing practices and better communicate with its customers. On February 25, Con Edison responded and said it will adjust its billing process to reduce the likelihood of significant customer bill volatility. Con Edison also said it would improve its communication with electric and gas customers.
Today the PSC issued letters to all of the state's other major electric and gas utilities calling on them to take steps to communicate proactively, protect customers, and mitigate costs impacts wherever possible, including through a variety of buying methods and hedges, as well as promote consumer payment assistance plans and programs to reduce energy usage. Separately, Governor Hochul called on the state's heating oil and propane suppliers to also be proactive in terms of increasing consumer awareness of options to reduce home heating bills.

**Aggressively Reducing New York's Reliance on Fossil Fuels**

Recent increases in energy supply costs are a painful reminder that the State remains overly reliant on fossil fuels to meet our energy needs. This dependence on fossil fuel is contributing to climate change and air pollution, but, as this experience shows, it is also exposing consumers to global commodity price fluctuations. We must continue working together to advance the State's Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act to both reduce greenhouse gas emissions and reduce our reliance on fossil fuels that are subject to dramatic price swings experienced this winter.

As New York moves toward a greener, cleaner economy, Governor Hochul is making significant investments to diversify electricity fuel sources through renewables to decrease the state’s reliance on fossil fuels and stabilize energy costs. Recognizing the magnitude of the climate crisis, Governor Hochul announced an ambitious renewable energy and jobs agenda in her 2022 State of the State address and Executive Budget proposal. This agenda includes the next offshore wind development solicitation; a $500 million investment for offshore wind port infrastructure and supply chain; achieving 2 million climate-friendly, electrified or electrification-ready homes by 2030; phasing out New York's dirtiest, polluting power plants; animating the market for new clean energy technologies like green hydrogen; and ensure quality green job creation.

**Millions of Dollars in Heating Utility Assistance Available**

To address the increase in supply prices, Governor Hochul today launched an enhanced statewide effort led by the Department of Public Service (DPS) and Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) to raise awareness of the various assistance programs available to help struggling New Yorkers pay heating and utility expenses. These programs will help avoid potential service interruptions throughout the remainder of the winter season. These programs include:

- The Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP), which can provide up to $751 to eligible homeowners and renters depending on income, household size and how they heat their home. A family of four may have a maximum gross monthly income of $5,249, or an annual gross income of $62,983, and still qualify for benefits. So far, 1.5 million regular HEAP benefits have been received by eligible households, totaling $216 million.
• New York State is also providing $250 million in additional federal funding to help low-income households pay heating utility arrears up to $10,000 per household. So far, almost 115,000 Regular Arrears Supplement benefits have been issued, and $183 million in arrears have been paid off for eligible households.
• $90 million in federal funding through Emergency HEAP was made available to help low- and middle-income New Yorkers avoid having their home heating disconnected or exhausting their heating source amid fuel price increases. Currently, $58 million in funding remains available to help low- and middle-income New Yorkers avoid having their home heating disconnected or exhausting their heating source amid fuel price increases this winter.
• An increase the budget for the statewide Energy Affordability Policy program by the PSC in 2021 from $237.6 million to $366.7 million and expanded eligibility, resulting in about 95,000 more low-income customers that will be able to receive benefits. Since September 2021, approximately $183 million in bill discounts were issued by utilities to eligible customers.
• Bill Payment Options: Residential consumers can inquire with their utility provider about billing options that allow for deferred payments or 'budget billing' to even out utility bills that are higher in one season and lower in another. This can help structure payments to make it easier to navigate costs.
• For low-income households facing no-heat situations, OTDA is also accepting applications for its heating equipment repair or replacement benefit. Eligible homeowners can now apply for up to $3,000 for repair or $6,500 for replacement of a furnace, boiler or other direct heating equipment necessary to keep the household's primary heating source working. Additionally, eligible households can receive energy efficiency services, which includes the cleaning of primary heating equipment to allow for its safe and efficient operation. Interested households can apply with their local HEAP contact.

In addition to bill payment assistance, customers are also urged to enroll in energy efficiency programs to help reduce energy consumption, lower bills overtime, and improve the health, comfort, and safety of their home. Residents can learn more about available programs and resources at www.energyadvisor.ny.gov or https://hcr.ny.gov/weatherization.

PSC Chair Rory M. Christian said, "While the PSC and the utilities cannot control supply prices, utilities can strengthen their communications to consumers to ensure they are offering all possible consumer protections and make them aware of every available assistance program."

OTDA Acting Commissioner Daniel W. Tietz said, "The spike in energy prices has affected everyone but has been particularly difficult for low-income households, working families and older New Yorkers. The Home Energy Assistance Program can provide
vital relief to eligible households that are facing a greater share of their family budgets going to their heating bills during these cold winter months."

**Increased Consumer Education and Awareness**

The PSC and DPS will continue to proactively warn customers of projected increases in supply prices, potential impacts to customers’ utility bills, and the assistance programs that are available. These efforts, in coordination with the state's electric and gas utilities, will include press releases, newsletters, utility call center representative training, YouTube videos, and social media posts.

Additionally, DPS and utilities will continue to remind customers about the consumer protections that are in place including under the New York State Home Energy Fair Practices Act, which has comprehensive protections for residential customers regarding their utility services. These rights include the option to pay bills in installments, a cap on late fees, sufficient notice prior to shut-off of services, and protections for those on a fixed income or with medical conditions. Learn about these from DPS at [AskPSC](#).

OTDA continues to work with its local government partners, utilities and heating fuel providers to ensure potentially eligible households are aware of assistance available to help New Yorkers cope with high heating costs.

The PSC is committed to making sure customers are aware of these programs to receive the assistance and information they need to effectively manage their energy bills. For more information on winter preparedness efforts and these assistance programs, please go to [www.dps.ny.gov/winter](http://www.dps.ny.gov/winter). To enroll in the Energy Affordability Policy utility bill discount program, customers should contact their individual utility:

Con Edison Customers: [Con Ed](#)
Orange & Rockland Customers: [O&R](#)
National Grid Customers: [National Grid](#)
National Fuel Gas Customers: [NFG](#)
NYSEG Customers: [NYSEG](#)
Rochester Gas & Electric Customers: [RGE](#)
PSEG-LI Customers: [PSEG](#)
Central Hudson Customers: [CH](#)

For more information on OTDA’s available assistance programs, please visit: [https://otda.ny.gov/programs/heap/](https://otda.ny.gov/programs/heap/)

###