



## New Jersey Board of Public Utilities

### NEWS RELEASE

**For Immediate Release:**

November 14, 2017

**Contact:**

Peter Peretzman

(609) 984-9707

J. Gregory Reinert

(609) 777-3305

### **Winter Utility Service Termination Protection Program Begins November 15**

Today, the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (Board) highlights that November 15<sup>th</sup> is the beginning of its annual Winter Termination Program (WTP), which protects residential customers of the regulated electric and natural gas utilities in the state, who qualify and enroll in the program, from having their natural gas and/or electric service turned off during the upcoming winter season.

“No one should fear or suffer the consequences from having their heat turned off in the dead of winter,” said Richard S. Mroz, N.J. Board of Public Utilities President. “The regulated utility companies want to work with their customers to ensure that they and their families can stay safe and warm during the winter. Yet it is important to stress that customers should make every effort to pay what they can during the winter months since their past due account balances come due once the Winter Termination Program ends. All too often, we see customers who experience financial hardship when the moratorium ends due to large balances owed. And if customers don’t satisfy their obligation, the utilities can turn off service after March 15.”

The Board’s program runs from November 15, 2017 through March 15, 2018. All customers who are eligible for the WTP are required to enroll in a 12-month budget payment plan with their utility. The utilities are required to consider the customer’s ability to pay when setting up a payment plan. Customers are further required to make good faith payments toward their budget plan. Although service cannot be terminated during this winter moratorium, customers remain liable for the balance of their utility bills once the WTP ends on March 15.

Customers who receive benefits from any one of the following programs are eligible to enroll and be protected by the Winter Termination Program: Lifeline Credit; Federal Home Energy Assistance; Work First New Jersey-Temporary Assistance to Needy Families; Federal Supplemental Security Income; Pharmaceutical Assistance to the Aged and Disabled; Work First New Jersey/General Assistance Benefits; and the Universal Service Fund. The program is also available to customers who

fall into a “catch-all” category of people who are unable to pay their utility bills because of circumstances beyond their control, such as unemployment, death of wage earner or illness. In addition to the WTP, eligible customers can seek utility bill assistance help from several other programs. Information about these programs can be accessed on the Board’s website at:

<http://www.bpu.state.nj.us/bpu/assistance/programs/>