

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2017 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 658
Finance

(Senator Benson, *et al.*)

Termination of Electric or Gas Service - Prohibition

This bill generally codifies existing Public Service Commission (PSC) regulations related to the termination of gas or electric service for nonpayment (1) during severe weather events and (2) if the termination will aggravate an existing serious illness or prevent the use of life support equipment of any occupant of the premises. There are minor differences related to the timing and definition of severe weather events, and a customer may self-certify a serious illness or the need for life support for the first 30 days. A public service company may not terminate electric or gas service for nonpayment on a Friday, a State or national holiday, or the day before the holiday. PSC must adopt regulations to implement the bill.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: PSC can adopt the required regulations with existing budgeted resources. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law/Background: Generally, PSC regulations require electric or gas companies to notify a customer at least 14 days prior to terminating service for nonpayment, except under specified conditions. PSC regulations include restrictions on terminations during

severe weather, for the elderly or individuals with disabilities, for serious illness and life support equipment, and during the heating season.

Terminations during Severe Weather: Under current law, a public service company may not terminate electric or gas service to a residential customer in periods of extreme heat or cold. PSC regulations further refine the general statutory requirement, defining an “extreme weather period” as three consecutive 24-hour segments starting at 6 a.m. during which the temperature is either not expected to exceed 32 degrees Fahrenheit or is expected to exceed 95 degrees Fahrenheit during the segments.

Serious Illness or Life Support: PSC regulations specify that electric or gas service may not be terminated for an initial period of up to 30 days beyond the scheduled date of service termination when the termination will aggravate an existing serious illness or prevent the use of life support equipment of any occupant of the premises, provided that certification of this fact is made by a licensed physician, certified nurse practitioner, or physician assistant. The certification may be renewed, without further limitations.

Next-day Service Reconnection: PSC regulations specify that, in nearly all cases, an electric or gas company may only terminate service if it is prepared to accept payment of the amount due and to reconnect service on both the day of the termination and the day subsequent to the termination.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: HB 1533 (Delegate Fennell) - Rules and Executive Nominations.

Information Source(s): Public Service Commission; Office of People’s Counsel; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - March 3, 2017
fn/lgc

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