

Utility Handout

CAN I GET HELP WITH MY UTILITIES?

- The Human Resources Administration (HRA) may be able to help you with financial assistance to pay utility bills (gas and electric). Grants to pay utility bills are available to recipients of Cash Assistance and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) as well as individuals with other sources of income who are facing an emergency with no available resources to meet the need.
- If you are currently in receipt of Cash Assistance or SSI, HRA will pay up to four months of utility arrears to prevent the shut-off of your utility service. Your utility service provider must continue or restore service if they receive payment from HRA even if all of the arrears are not paid.
- If you do not currently receive Cash Assistance, you may also be eligible for an emergency grant to prevent the shut-off of your utility service or to restore your utility service.
- If you receive Cash Assistance or SSI, you may also be eligible for a utility guarantee.

WHAT DOES A UTILITY GUARANTEE MEAN?

- HRA is assuring the utility company that during a period of up to six (6) months it will make a utility payment if the Cash Assistance recipient or SSI recipient who has the utility guarantee cannot.
- If you receive a utility guarantee, you remain responsible for the payment of all future utility bills.

WHAT IS THE BENEFIT OF A UTILITY GUARANTEE?

- You will not be required to pay back the amount HRA pays your utility provider to prevent a utility shut-off.
- During the guarantee period, the utility service provider will not:
 - Turn off your service for any balance not paid by HRA; or
 - Make any attempts to collect the remaining unpaid balance.

Example: If you are on Cash Assistance or SSI and the bill is for \$100 and HRA pays only \$75, the utility service provider will not turn off your service because you still owe \$25.

HOW LONG WILL THE UTILITY GUARANTEE LAST?

- The utility guarantee will remain in effect for up to six months. The utility guarantee period will end in less than six months if your Cash Assistance case closes or your SSI benefits are stopped prior to the end of the six month period. The guarantee will end even if your Cash Assistance case is closed because you began receiving SSI.

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WHAT HAPPENS IF I CAN'T PAY MY UTILITY BILL DURING THE GUARANTEE PERIOD?

- If you do not pay the full amount of your bill during the guarantee period, your utility service provider will notify HRA. HRA will be required to pay any amount not paid by you during the guarantee period.
- If you are a Cash Assistance recipient, any amount paid by HRA during the guarantee period will be taken out of your Cash Assistance grant until the full amount is repaid to HRA. This is called a recoupment. Also, the energy allowance, which is part of your grant, will be removed from your grant (this is called a utility allowance restriction) and HRA will pay your monthly utility bill with that allowance directly to your utility service provider (this is called a direct vendor payment).
- If you are an SSI recipient and HRA paid your utility arrears, you are not required to repay any amount HRA pays to your utility service provider.

WHAT HAPPENS IF MY CASH ASSISTANCE CASE CLOSES BEFORE THE UTILITY GUARANTEE EXPIRES?

- If your Cash Assistance case closes before the utility guarantee expires, the utility guarantee period ends on the date that your case closes. Any time remaining on the utility guarantee period is lost.
- HRA notifies the utility service provider that your Cash Assistance case is closed. Your utility service provider will bill you for any outstanding amount you owed that HRA did not pay and which your utility service provider set aside and did not bill to you while you were receiving Cash Assistance or SSI.
- The utility service provider will send you a notice with the full arrears amount that is now due because your Cash Assistance case is closed. You will also receive a bill with the arrears amount, as well as the amount for your current monthly usage.
- If you do not pay the arrears amount or make a payment agreement with the utility service provider to pay off the arrears, you may receive a utility disconnect notice. If you receive a utility disconnect notice, you may apply for emergency assistance at HRA.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE UTILITY GUARANTEE EXPIRES?

- When the guarantee period ends, HRA will not be notified if you do not pay your bill and HRA will not make a utility payment to your service provider.
- If you are still receiving Cash Assistance or SSI when the guarantee period ends, the amount you owed the utility service provider when the guarantee was issued will remain on your account but won't be billed to you until your Cash Assistance case closes or your SSI ends.
- If you do not pay your ongoing utility bills, your utility service provider may issue a utility disconnect notice.

WHAT HAPPENS IF THE UTILITY GUARANTEE EXPIRES AND I STILL CAN'T PAY MY BILLS?

- After the guarantee period ends, if you receive a turn off notice, you should apply for emergency assistance. You may be eligible for another utility arrears payment and another utility guarantee period. Contact 311 for more information on how to apply.