

## Representing Yourself at an Informal Hearing at the Division of Public Utilities

It is your right as a utility customer to have a hearing at the Division of Public Utilities if you are facing shut-off or have another issue you are not able to resolve with the utility company. If you receive a shut-off notice, by requesting an informal hearing you will be protected from shut-off until after the hearing. This will give you some time to make your case before the Division and to consider next steps to avoid shut-off.

- 1) Call the Division of Public Utilities (401-780-9700, 89 Jefferson Blvd, Warwick RI 02888) and request an "informal hearing." (If you are denied or discouraged from exercising your right to a hearing, ask on what legal terms you are being denied. Make a note of this.) Request a bilingual hearing officer if needed. Write down the date of the hearing, and be sure to cancel the hearing if your issue is resolved beforehand or if you are unable to attend. The Division may deny you another hearing if you miss the scheduled hearing date.
- 2) Call the George Wiley Center (401-728-5555) to see if a member or volunteer is able to accompany you at the hearing. Also, ask supportive family members, friends, your elected officials, etc. to attend your hearing or offer letters of support.
- 3) Start making some kind of payment before your hearing, even a small amount. This will show a good faith effort when your payment history is discussed at the hearing.
- 4) Put together a "monthly budget", the amount of your income minus all the bills that must be paid. (Ex. Rent, food, medication, gas or oil, electricity, other utilities, etc.) The George Wiley Center has an example monthly budget form you can use. Bring this and any other documentation (bills, medical records, etc.) with you to the hearing. At the hearing the Division is able to change your payment plan based on what is actually affordable for your household, so it is important to educate the hearing officials about the details of your situation.
- 5) Prepare to tell your story, your special circumstances, including personal hardship such as unemployment, medical issues, children, divorce, etc. Let the Division hear what it is like to be you, to not have enough to afford your high payment plans for utilities that you can't live without. Be prepared for the utility company representative to have a history of your payments, including missed and defaulted. Document all attempts you have made to request assistance, and if it they were denied, such as LIHEAP, Salvation Army, churches, etc.
- 6) On the day of the hearing, arrive early to meet with your supporters beforehand. Shut off cell phones and tuck them away during the hearing.
- 7) Share your story, monthly budget, and individual hardship circumstances with the Division. Tell them you want to pay the bills and what you can afford.
- 8) Do not make a deal at the hearing unless you really can afford the payments. Make sure the Hearing Officer tells you they have up to thirty days to make a decision on a payment plan.
- 9) Stay in contact with the George Wiley Center, update us as soon as you get the written response from the Division. If the informal hearing does not result in an adequate outcome, you may request a formal hearing to appeal the decision, and you will continue to be protected from termination until the formal hearing.
- 10) Attend meetings and actions to strengthen protections and improve policies that impact all RI utility consumers. Together we are stronger!

### George Wiley Center

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