

SPECIAL EDITION

CONSUMER SPOTLIGHT

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE & CONSUMER AFFAIRS
DIVISION OF CONSUMER ADVOCACY



Executive Director's Message

By: Dean Nishina



Last year on May 4, 2020 the Public Utilities Commission put forth an order addressing the Consumer Advocate's request to suspend the authority of regulated electric, gas, water/wastewater, and telecom utilities to terminate or disconnect services due to non-payment, and avoid the assessment of other unreasonable charges.

The Consumer Advocate has been actively engaged in providing comments and feedback to the Commission regarding the suspension of a utility's ability to terminate regulated utility services for non-payment. Our office has stood firm in its recommendations to extend the moratorium for the duration of the pandemic, require utilities to provide standardized data, and request utilities to develop payment plans.

The end of the disconnection moratorium is set for **June 1, 2021**. With the impending end of the suspension of services due to non-payment, utilities have been required to develop payment plans, notify customers that the suspension is being lifted, as well as file a "Pre-Disconnection Suspension Termination Report". Continue reading for more COVID-19 utility information including payment plans, and utility bill assistance programs that you may qualify for.

INCREASING NUMBER OF UTILITY SCAMS DURING COVID-19 OUTBREAK

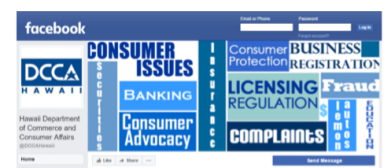
The Consumer Advocate wants to remind utility customers who are navigating the coronavirus pandemic to also be on the lookout for scams.

- If the caller says your utility account is delinquent and threatens to shut off service immediately unless payment is made, it's a scam.
- If someone calls demanding immediate payment over the phone, via money transfer, prepaid debit cards or by Bitcoin, it's a scam.
- If the caller asks to meet the customer in person to pick up a payment, it's a scam.

Keep an eye out, spread the word, and help protect your community by reporting any scams you see at [ReportFraud.ftc.gov](https://www.ftc.gov/ReportFraud).

In this issue:

- Increasing number of utility scams during COVID-19 outbreak
- COVID-19 Utility Update - End of the Moratorium
- Utility Bill Assistance Programs



us!

www.facebook.com/DCCAHawaii



COVID-19 Utility Update

The End of the Moratorium - June 1, 2021

Beginning in May 2020, the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) determined that "based on the extraordinary circumstances related to COVID-19, and on the expedited investigation into this matter, all Commission-regulated electric, gas, telecommunications, water, and wastewater public utilities in the State of Hawaii shall suspend disconnections of electricity, gas, telecommunications, water, and wastewater services during the pendency of the Governor's Emergency Proclamation until otherwise ordered by the Commission." Essentially, the moratorium imposed was a temporary ban on a utility's ability to shutoff service for non-payment, meaning utility companies can't cut your access to electricity, water, gas, or electricity due to non-payment. This order has been extended several times and is now coming to an end on June 1, 2021.

What Does This Mean For Me?

- The moratorium did not and does not mean free utility service. You are still responsible for paying for the utility services that you used before and during the moratorium. The moratorium denied the ability for the service to be cut-off due to non-payment while customers may have been facing unemployment or other hardships during the pandemic. That moratorium will be ending.
- Customers who have fallen behind on utility bills may face disconnection and late fees after May 31, 2021 unless a payment plan is set up.
- If you fall behind on payments after June 1st, you may receive charges related to interest on delinquent balances, late fees, and/or disconnection of utility services due to non-payment of bills.

How Do I Sign Up For a Payment Plan?

- Contact your utility company directly to work out payment arrangements.

View Payment Plan and COVID-19 Response Information on Utility Websites

- [AT&T](#)

- [Hawaii Water Service](#)

- [Hawaii American Water Company](#)

- [Hawaiian Electric](#)

- [Hawaii Beaches Water Company](#)

- [Kauai Island Utility Cooperative](#)

- [Hawaii Gas](#)

- [Lanai Water Company](#)

What Other Utility Bill Assistance Is Available?



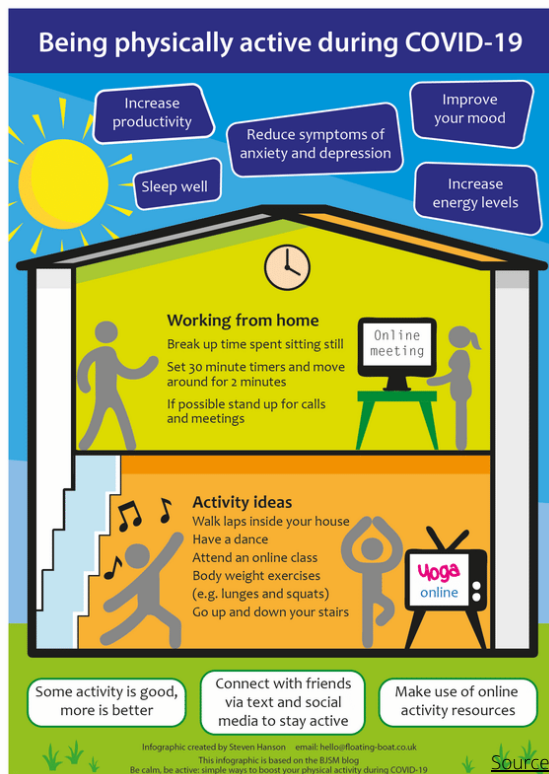
Various federal, state, and county programs have been providing assistance during the pandemic to help residents with payments for utility bills. The Division of Consumer Advocacy supports the efforts of those providing aid in our communities as Hawaii continues to face the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Division of Consumer Advocacy wants to help inform consumers who may be in need of assistance of programs they may qualify for. Please note that, due to the high demand for assistance, the following programs may quickly reach capacity. Check directly with assistance providers for the most up to date information.

- **Department of Hawaiian Homelands Rent Relief Program**
 - Provides rent and utility assistance to native Hawaiians on the DHHL Waiting List who experienced financial hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic and are renters in the state of Hawaii.
- **Emergency Broadband Benefit**
 - Helps families and households struggling to afford internet service during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Hawaii County Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP)**
 - Provides grants to low-income renters on Hawaii Island who have lost or reduced income due to COVID-19 for paying rent, utility bills, or both.
- **Kaua'i 2021 Coronavirus Rental and Utility Assistance Program**
 - Designed to support individuals and families pay essential cost of living expenses. Eligible expenses include future rent, rental arrears and utilities in arrears for the period March 2020 through December 2021.
- **Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)**
 - Provides heating and/or cooling assistance to needy Hawai'i households by assisting with a one-time payment towards their utility bill (electric or gas) in two ways:
 - **Energy Crisis Intervention (ECI)** assists households in crisis. *Applications for ECI are accepted year-round, but the amount of approvals each month are limited and fill quickly.
 - **Energy Credit (EC)** assists households who are not in crisis but need assistance with bill payment for the heating and cooling of their residence. *Applications for EC are accepted once a year, June 1-30.
- **Maui County Emergency Rental Assistance Program**
 - Helps low-income households that have been hit hardest financially by the COVID-19 pandemic pay their rent, utility bills, or both.
- **Rental & Utility Relief Program (Currently Paused)**
 - Helps qualified people on O'ahu pay for their rent and their bills for electricity, water and sewer, and natural gas. The program is temporarily closed to new applications for processing but will reopen again on Monday, June 7th, 2021.

Upcoming Dates of Interest

- **May 31, 2021: Memorial Day** (State holiday, our office will be closed)
- **June 1, 2021: End of the moratorium on utility suspension/termination**
- **June 1, 2021: Applications open for LIHEAP Energy Credit**
- **June 11, 2021: King Kamehameha I Day** (State holiday, our office will be closed)
- **June 21, 2021: Safe Digging and Hawaii One Call Law Online Training** <https://puc.hawaii.gov/one-call-training/>



Contact Us

Division of Consumer Advocacy
P.O. Box 541 Honolulu, HI 96809
Phone: (808) 586-2800
Fax: (808) 586-2780
E-mail: dca@dcca.hawaii.gov
Web Address: dcca.hawaii.gov/dca

Also Visit

Public Utilities Commission (PUC)
465 South King St., Rm. 103
Honolulu, HI 96813
Phone: (808) 586-2020
Fax: (808) 586-2066
E-mail: puc@hawaii.gov
Web Address: puc.hawaii.gov

Federal Communications Commission (FCC)
445 12th St., SW
Washington, DC 20554
Toll-Free: 1-888-225-5322
E-mail: fccinfo@fcc.gov
Web Address: www.fcc.gov/consumers

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC)
888 First St., NE
Washington, DC 20426
Toll-Free: 1-866-208-3372
E-mail: customer@ferc.gov
Web Address: www.ferc.gov

Consumer Spotlight

Subscribe to DCA's newsletter

Subscribe on our website at cca.hawaii.gov/dca/subscribe.

We also welcome feedback and story ideas. Email us at dca@dcca.hawaii.gov.