



Breaking Barriers to Justice

COVID-19 and UTILITIES

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

NOTE: The Frequently Asked Questions below were written to help answer questions we have heard because of the COVID-19 emergency. It is important to have reliable information when dealing with a public health emergency. However, the situation is changing very rapidly and the information below may not be up-to-date. Under normal circumstances, many of the answers may be different. The information that follows is based on Illinois and US laws, regulations, and emergency orders. This information is intended only to be an overview of your rights. Since every case is different, you should not rely on this information as a substitute for an attorney.

Can my utility company cut-off my service because I can't pay my bill?

Regulated public utilities, such as Ameren, have been ordered to stop disconnecting utilities for non-payment until May 1st or until Illinois Governor Pritzker declares an end to the state of emergency of the coronavirus pandemic, whichever occurs later.

Public utilities include electric, gas, water and sewer. Some of the regulated public utilities that have to comply with the Executive Order to stop disconnections are:

Ameren

Mt. Carmel Public Utility

Illinois-American Water

Aqua Illinois

Utility Services of Illinois

Nicor

Non-regulated utilities, such as municipality owned electrical or water co-operatives, might not have to comply with the Order made to public utilities. However, the Illinois Commerce Commission has asked them to voluntarily stop disconnections. Many have agreed to do so.

If you are behind on utility payments, and you are not sure if the utility company is regulated or not, call your utility company and ask.

Can my utility company still charge late fees and penalties because of my non-payment?

No. After March 18, 2020, regulated utilities cannot charge late fees and penalties. If you are behind on payments to the utility, as of March 18th, it must stop charging late fees and penalties. Any penalties you incurred before March 18th do not have to be waived by the utility. Regulated utilities cannot charge late fees until May 1st or the Governor ends the state of emergency.

Non-regulated utilities were asked to do the same and many have agreed so check with your utility provider.

Can I work out a payment plan with my utility company if I fall behind on my payments because of the COVID 19 crisis?

The regulated utilities were ordered to come up with a policy for making flexible repayment plans and must get approval of their plans from the State authorities. Contact your utility company and see if it has a proposal to help you with payment options. You should do this even if your utility provider is a private non-regulated one.

Can my phone or internet service be disconnected if I can't pay my bill right now?

While your phone company, cell phone providers, and internet providers can still stop your service if you don't pay your bill, the Illinois Commerce Commission has asked the telecommunications providers to voluntarily stop disconnections. Many have agreed to do so.

Also, many telecommunications companies have signed a Keep Americans Connected Pledge with the Federal Communications Commission. By signing the pledge, these companies agree not to disconnect service because of someone can't to pay the bill related to COVID-19 and agree to waive late fees. Some companies are doing this even if they have not signed the Pledge.

If you can't pay your bill, talk to your phone provider about your options.

Can my cable or trash service be stopped if I can't pay my bill right now?

Yes. If you are having trouble paying your bill, call the company and ask them what your payment options are.

Are there other legal resources available besides Land of Lincoln?

The Public Interest Law Initiative PILI has set up the COVID-19 Illinois Free Legal Answers Task Force. [Illinois Free Legal Answers](http://il.freelegalanswers.org) is a secure website (il.freelegalanswers.org) where low-income Illinoisans can ask a lawyer a question about a civil legal issue.

You can also call or email the Illinois Lawyer Finder Service. The telephone number is 800-922-8757 and the website is www.isba.org/public/illinoislawyerfinder.

Illinois Legal Aid Online also has a lot of legal information at www.illinoislegalaid.org.

**Land of Lincoln Legal Aid
Legal Advice & Referral Center
Phone: (618) 394-7300
1 (877) 342-7891**

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