

RCW 54.16.285 Limitations on termination of utility service for residential heating and of electric or water utility service during heat-related alerts.

*** CHANGE IN 2026 *** (SEE 2575.SL) ***

(1) A district providing utility service for residential space heating shall not terminate such utility service between November 15 through March 15 if the customer:

(a) Notifies the utility of the inability to pay the bill. This notice should be provided within five business days of receiving a payment overdue notice unless there are extenuating circumstances. If the customer fails to notify the utility within five business days and service is terminated, the customer can, by fulfilling the requirements of this section, receive the protections of this chapter;

(b) Provides self-certification of household income for the prior 12 months to a grantee of the department of commerce which administers federally funded energy assistance programs. The grantee shall determine that the household income does not exceed the maximum allowed for eligibility under the state's plan for low-income energy assistance under 42 U.S.C. 8624 and shall provide a dollar figure that is seven percent of household income. The grantee may verify information provided in the self-certification;

(c) Has applied for home heating assistance from applicable government and private sector organizations and certifies that any assistance received will be applied to the current bill and future utility bills;

(d) Has applied for low-income weatherization assistance to the utility or other appropriate agency if such assistance is available for the dwelling;

(e) Agrees to a payment plan and agrees to maintain the payment plan. The plan will be designed both to pay the past due bill by the following October 15 and to pay for continued utility service. If the past due bill is not paid by the following October 15, the customer shall not be eligible for protections under this chapter until the past due bill is paid. The plan shall not require monthly payments in excess of seven percent of the customer's monthly income plus one-twelfth of any arrearage accrued from the date application is made and thereafter during November 15 through March 15. A customer may agree to pay a higher percentage during this period, but shall not be in default unless payment during this period is less than seven percent of monthly income plus one-twelfth of any arrearage accrued from the date application is made and thereafter. If assistance payments are received by the customer subsequent to implementation of the plan, the customer shall contact the utility to reformulate the plan; and

(f) Agrees to pay the moneys owed even if the customer moves.

(2) The utility shall:

(a) Include in any notice that an account is delinquent and that service may be subject to termination, a description of the customer's duties in this section;

(b) Assist the customer in fulfilling the requirements under this section;

(c) Be authorized to transfer an account to a new residence when a customer who has established a plan under this section moves from one residence to another within the same utility service area;

(d) Be permitted to disconnect service if the customer fails to honor the payment program except on the days indicated in subsection

(5) of this section. Utilities may continue to disconnect service for those practices authorized by law other than for nonpayment as provided for in this section. Customers who qualify for payment plans under this section who default on their payment plans and are disconnected can be reconnected and maintain the protections afforded under this chapter by paying all amounts that would have been due and owing under the terms of the applicable payment plan, absent default, on the date on which service is reconnected; and

(e) Advise the customer in writing at the time it disconnects service that it will restore service if the customer contacts the utility and fulfills the other requirements of this section.

(3) All districts providing utility service for residential space heating shall offer residential customers the option of a budget billing or equal payment plan. The budget billing or equal payment plan shall be offered low-income customers eligible under the state's plan for low-income energy assistance prepared in accordance with 42 U.S.C. 8624(C)(1) without limiting availability to certain months of the year, without regard to the length of time the customer has occupied the premises, and without regard to whether the customer is the tenant or owner of the premises occupied.

(4) An agreement between the customer and the utility, whether oral or written, shall not waive the protections afforded under this chapter.

(5) A district providing electric or water utility service to residential customers may not effect, due to lack of payment, an involuntary termination of utility service to any residential user, including tenants of metered apartment buildings and residents of mobile homes, on any day for which the national weather service has issued or has announced that it intends to issue a heat-related alert, such as an excessive heat warning, a heat advisory, an excessive heat watch, or a similar alert, for the area in which the residential user's address is located.

(6) (a) A residential user at whose dwelling utility service has been disconnected for lack of payment may request that the district reconnect service on any day for which the national weather service has issued or has announced that it intends to issue a heat-related alert, such as an excessive heat warning, a heat advisory, an excessive heat watch, or a similar alert, for the area in which the residential user's address is located. The district shall inform all customers in the notice of disconnection of the ability to seek reconnection and provide clear and specific information on how to make that request, including how to contact the district.

(b) Upon receipt of a request made pursuant to (a) of this subsection, the district shall promptly make a reasonable attempt to reconnect service to the dwelling. The district, in connection with a request made pursuant to (a) of this subsection, may require the residential user to enter into a payment plan prior to reconnecting service to the dwelling. If the district requires the residential user to enter into a repayment plan, the repayment plan must comply with subsection (7) of this section.

(7) A repayment plan required by a district pursuant to subsection (6) (b) of this section will be designed both to pay the past due bill by the following May 15th, or as soon as possible after May 15th if needed to maintain monthly payments that are no greater than six percent of the customer's monthly income, and to pay for continued utility service. The plan may not require monthly payments in excess of six percent of the customer's monthly income. A customer

may agree to pay a higher percentage during this period, but will not be in default unless payment during this period is less than six percent of the customer's monthly income. If assistance payments are received by the customer subsequent to implementation of the plan, the customer shall contact the district to reformulate the plan.

(8) On an annual basis, each district with more than 25,000 retail electric customers or 2,500 water customers in Washington must submit a report to the department of commerce that includes the total number of disconnections that occurred on each day for which the national weather service issued, or announced that it intended to issue, a heat-related alert. Districts with fewer than 25,000 retail electric customers or 2,500 water customers in Washington must provide similar information upon request by the department.

(a) Subject to availability, each district must provide any other information related to utility disconnections that is requested by the department.

(b) The information required in this subsection must be submitted in a form, timeline, and manner as prescribed by the department.

[2023 c 105 s 4; 1995 c 399 s 144; 1991 c 165 s 3; 1990 1st ex.s. c 1 s 3; 1986 c 245 s 3; 1985 c 6 s 19; 1984 c 251 s 2.]

Findings—1991 c 165: See note following RCW 35.21.300.