

No April Fools

April 1st may be a day of silly pranks for most of us, but for others it is a day fraught with reality. Utility customers who cannot or will not pay utility bills face utility shut-off. PGW has said that they will begin terminations of 130,000 customers, while PECO Energy Company has indicated that 68,000 of its customers face shut-off. The Philadelphia Water Department has not indicated how many customers face shut-off, but it will surely be in the thousands. While there are customers who can afford to pay, but take advantage of the “winter moratoriums” and do not, others simply cannot afford to pay. The Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission has restrictions in place from December 1 through March 31 which limit utility companies’ ability to terminate customers who fail to pay their utility bills. These restrictions are in place to protect the health and safety of utility customers during the time when the harshest weather occurs. Because some customers may take advantage or “game the system,” don’t penalize everyone. Our applicants are just trying to survive. They need for you to continue to financially support the Utility Emergency Services Fund and similar organizations which help low-income families maintain vital utility services.

The households the Utility Emergency Services Fund helps have an average annual income of \$9,171 and consist of two or three persons. The annual Philadelphia household’s burden for the three basic utility services (gas, electric and water) is \$2,730 - - gas \$1,450, \$960 electric, and \$320 water & sewage. This represents a burden of nearly 30% of the average UESF recipient household’s income. The typical American family pays between 5%-7% of their annual income for these same vital utilities. Keep in mind that UESF households also need to pay: rent or mortgage, food, health care and medicines, clothing, transportation, and work related expenses. Yes, nearly 25% of the households UESF helps are employed, yet because of minimum wage earnings, still need help.

We screen our recipients very closely and require proof of income and social security numbers for all household members. We also require that our recipients apply for and exhaust all other government resources which are available. We don’t look at our program as an income maintenance program, so we do not allow recipients to come to us year after year. You can only apply for our services once every other year. We use 175% of the federal poverty income guidelines as our standard. This income standard is more liberal than most programs, because we want to help middle income families that are facing sudden unemployment. We want to get them back on their feet. Sadly, many households are only one or two paychecks from ruin.

Don’t paint everyone with the same brush. The households we help are truly needy. With the unusually large volume of terminations, we fully expect to run out of funds before June 30. Therefore, please make a special effort to support our May 1, 2004

Philadelphia Treasures Walk or make a direct contribution. We are looking for walkers, volunteers and commercial sponsors.

Respectfully,

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