

UTILITY ACCESSIBILITY DURING AND POST-PANDEMIC

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About PULP:

What We Do:

- Represent groups and individuals
- Policy
- Advocacy
- Education
- Outreach
- Support to legal and social service providers

Mission:

Assist Pennsylvania's low income families to connect and maintain safe and affordable utility services to their home.



PULP
PENNSYLVANIA
UTILITY LAW PROJECT

Image Description:
PULP's logo

Recover, Rebuild, Reform – Utility Access

•Recover:

- Evaluate immediate need and avenues for addressing immediate need

•Rebuild:

- Identify lessons learned during the pandemic
- Work with community partners

•Reform:

- Develop broad policy solutions to address necessary systemic changes

The Importance of Utility Access



Image Description: A group of utility services, like electricity and heat, surrounding and connecting to a happy and healthy home.

Utilities are Essential!

Pre- and Post-Pandemic

- Health and safety
- Housing stability
- Sanitation
- Comfort (heating/cooling)
- Refrigeration
- Drinking water / flushing
- Receiving emergency alerts
- Connection with resources, services, and loved ones

During Pandemic

- Shelter-in-place
- Hand washing
- Telehealth appointments
- Working from home
- Zoom school

Access to Internet for All

**“It's literally the only way for me to continue to make income. Also, it's the only way I have to really have interaction with folks because it's not safe for me to go...
I know a lot of folks with kids ... [and it] has been a hit or miss on having laptops and having availability, much less also getting the internet access.”**

Image Description: Speech bubble with quote regarding internet service

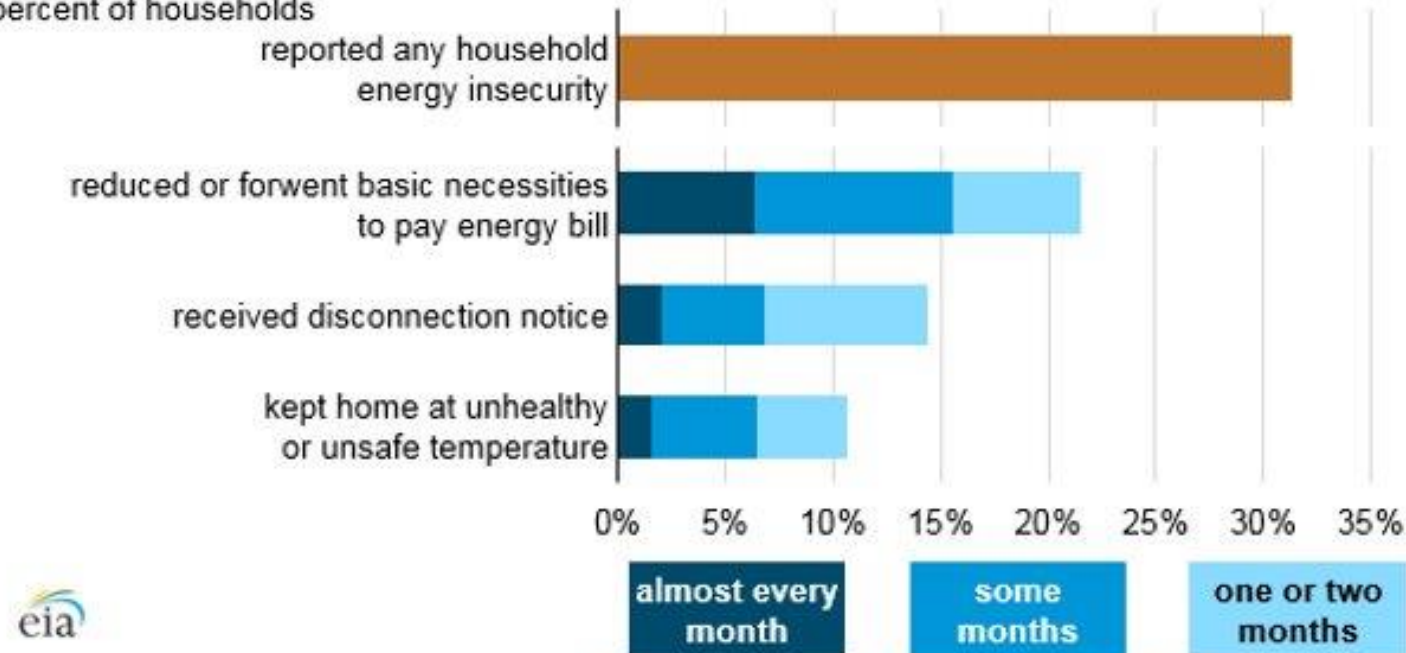
Energy Poverty

- Three primary contributing factors:
 - *Inadequate Income*
 - *High Energy Prices*
 - *Energy Inefficient Housing*
- EP is measured by evaluating a household's energy burden.
 - Energy burden is the percentage of income dedicated to home heat and electricity.
- Low income households have higher relative energy burdens.

Pre-Pandemic Energy Poverty

One in three U.S. households faces a challenge in meeting energy needs

Households that experienced energy insecure situations, 2015
percent of households



Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration, *Residential Energy Consumption Survey 2015*

- One in five households buy less or do without necessities like food and medicine to pay their energy bills.
- 14% of households are disconnected from utility service every year.
- 11% of households keep their homes at unhealthy or unsafe temperatures.

Image Description: An energy survey by the U.S. Dept. Of Energy showing that 1 in 3 households struggle to afford their utilities.

Doing Without

"I think there's some really tough choices...So, you have to maybe stick with having grilled cheese sandwiches for a month so that you can get your medication and you're paying \$20 on that electric bill and \$40 on the gas bill now that it's getting close to the winter."

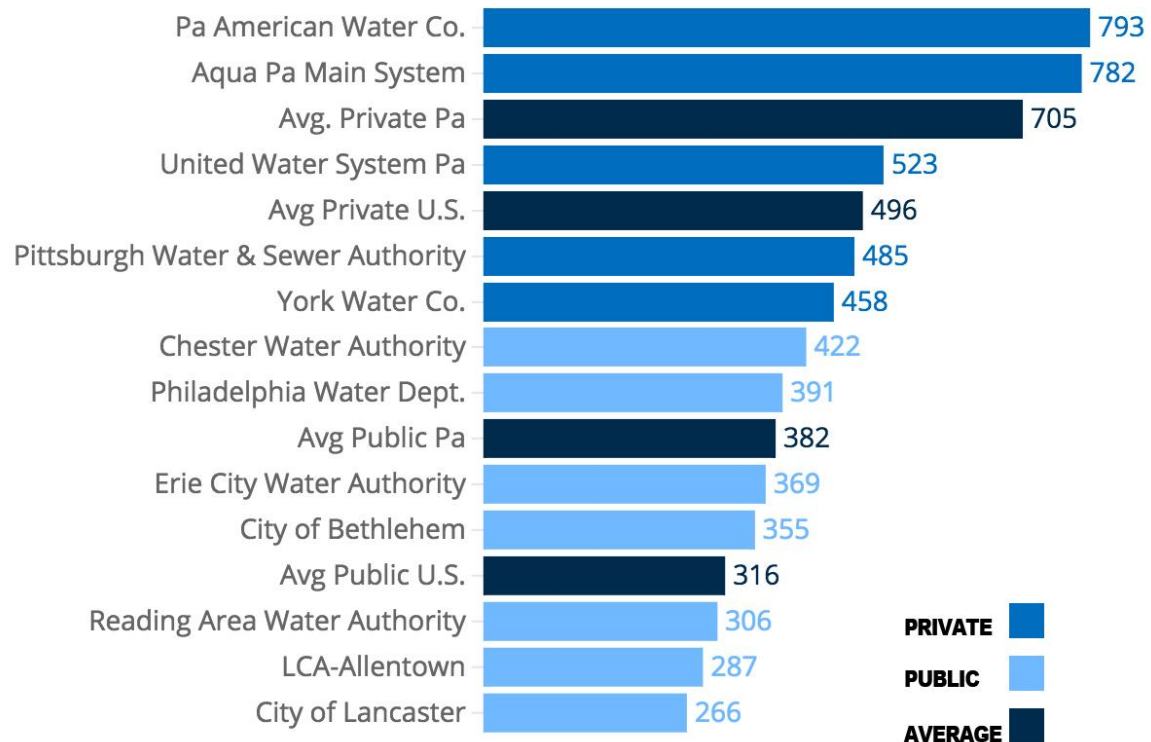
"[G]as for the summertime was probably the bill that really could go without. You can microwave a sandwich. If you have a toaster oven, you can use that. You have some other options on food. As we're going to close to wintertime, that might have to change up because you're going to need [gas] heat."

Image Description: Two speech bubbles with quotes about having to go without

Water & Wastewater Insecurity

HOW THE COST OF WATER IN PA. COMPARES : THE NATION'S 500 LARGEST WATER SYSTEMS

AVERAGE COST \$ / 60,000 GALLONS



- Public vs. Private Water
- Terminations can cause condemnation / eviction, triggering homelessness and family separation.

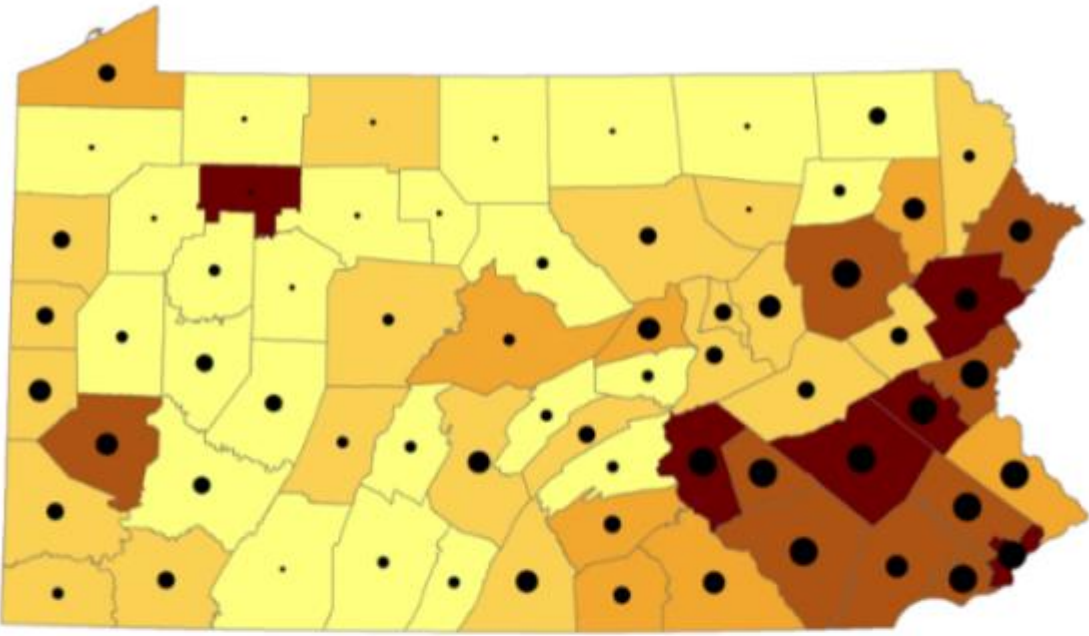
Image Description: A chart showing the high cost of water in PA.

Utility Insecurity & the Pandemic

- Utility service is life-sustaining and necessary for basic survival.
- Amplified existing inequities in utility access and affordability
- Low income communities / communities of color disproportionately impacted by pandemic:
 - higher rates of infection
 - higher levels of unemployment
 - higher energy burden
 - higher rates of energy poverty
 - more likely to live in poor quality housing, with higher exposure to extreme temperatures, mold, asbestos, lead in drinking water, etc.
- Link between housing stability and utility accessibility/affordability
- Utility service should be available to all, regardless of ability to pay.

A Snapshot of September 2020

Snapshot of September 2020 COVID-19 Cases by County

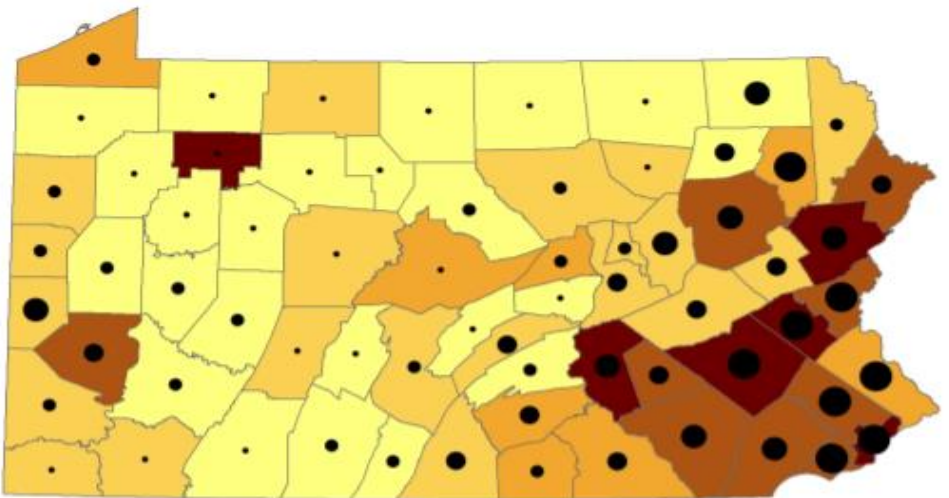


COVID-19 Cases by County (September 2020)

% Non-White Population	COVID-19 Cases Per 100k
3% - 7%	• 50 - 194
8% - 13%	• 195 - 369
14% - 19%	• 370 - 656
20% - 34%	• 657 - 1,015
35% - 73%	• 1,016 - 1,806

Image Description: This map shows that counties with a larger share of Pennsylvania residents of color had higher rates of COVID-19 infections in September 2020.

Snapshot of September 2020 COVID-19 Deaths by County



COVID-19 Deaths by County (September 2020)

% Non-White Population		COVID-19 Deaths Per 100k	
Light Yellow	3% - 7%	Small dot	0 - 8
Yellow-Orange	8% - 13%	Medium dot	9 - 23
Orange	14% - 19%	Large dot	24 - 44
Brown	20% - 34%	Very large dot	45 - 80
Dark Red	35% - 73%	Extremely large dot	81 - 128

Image Description: This map shows that counties with a larger share of Pennsylvania residents of color had higher death rates of COVID-19 infections in September 2020.

Pennsylvania Counties with the Largest Number of COVID-19 Cases (September 2020)

County	Population	Cases	Cases per 100,000 People
Philadelphia*	1,575,522	28,452	1,806
Montgomery*	821,301	10,768	1,311
Delaware*	563,527	9,848	1,748
Allegheny*	1,225,561	9,681	790
Bucks	626,370	7,020	1,121
Lancaster	538,347	6,389	1,187
Berks*	416,642	5,711	1,371
Chester*	517,156	5,248	1,015
Lehigh*	362,613	5,067	1,397
Northampton	301,778	3,944	1,307

Notes. *Indicates that the county is among the top 10 Pennsylvania counties in terms of non-white population.

Image Description: This chart shows that counties with a larger share of Pennsylvania residents of color had higher rates of COVID-19 infections in September 2020.

Pennsylvania Counties with the Largest Number of COVID-19 Deaths (September 2020)

County	Population	Deaths	Deaths per 100,000 People
Philadelphia*	1,575,522	1,759	112
Montgomery*	821,301	862	105
Delaware*	563,527	721	128
Bucks	626,370	585	93
Lancaster	538,347	428	80
Berks*	416,642	378	91
Chester*	517,156	352	68
Lehigh*	362,613	342	94
Northampton*	301,778	297	98
Allegheny*	1,225,561	296	24

Notes. *Indicates that the county is among the top 10 Pennsylvania counties in terms of non-white population

Image Description: This chart shows that counties with a larger share of Pennsylvania residents of color had higher death rates of COVID-19 infections in September 2020.

Bill Assistance Programs

- "Customer Assistance Program" or "CAP"
 - *May also be called OnTrack, LIRA, CRP, PCAP, BDP, H₂O, Helping Hand*
- Available for customers at all major electric and gas companies, and some water companies
- Typical Eligibility:
 - Low income
- Typical Benefits:
 - Bill discount
 - Debt forgiveness over time (12-36 months)
 - *Some water companies do not offer debt forgiveness.*

Hardship Funds

- Also referred to as "Hardship Grants" and many are under the "Dollar Energy Fund"
- Available at all major electric and gas companies and some large water companies
- Typical Eligibility:
 - Low income
 - Service off or facing shutoff
 - Minimum debt balance
 - Demonstrated sincere payment effort
 - Hardship grant must fix crisis
- Typical Benefits:
 - Up to \$500 grant

Low Income Usage Reduction Program

- "Low Income Usage Reduction Program" or "LIURP"
 - *Also called Smart Comfort or WRAP*
- Available at all major electric and gas utilities.
- Typical Eligibility:
 - Low income
 - High energy usage
 - Landlord permission (if renter)
- Typical Benefits:
 - Energy audit
 - Education
 - Conservation measures
 - Bill savings

Weatherization Assistance Program

- "Weatherization Assistance Program" or "WAP"
- Eligibility: Low income
- Potential Benefits:
 - On site energy audit
 - Air sealing
 - Insulation and ventilation
 - Heating system modification or replacement
 - Minor repairs, and/or health and safety measures
 - Education on the proper use and maintenance of the installed weatherization measures and ways to reduce energy waste

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program

- Winter heat program – Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program ([LIHEAP](#))

Eligibility

- PA resident, low income, home heating responsibility (direct or through rent).

Benefits Available Every Year:

- Cash Grants
- Crisis Grants
 - *Must have an imminent home heating emergency (termination risk / out of fuel)*
- Emergency Heating System Repair

PULP's annual LIHEAP Webinar + [Advocates Manual](#)

Pandemic-Related Programs

Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) - also available for utilities!

- Eligibility: Renter, 80% Area Median Income, reduction in income / financial hardship due to COVID-19
- Benefits: Grants for rent and/or utility assistance
- Apply through COMPASS or Local County Administrator.

Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP)

- Federal emergency program to assist families behind on drinking water and wastewater bills to prevent shutoffs.
- Proposed program would provide emergency grants to cover debts
- Likely available January 1, 2021

Pandemic-Related Programs, Continued

Homeowner Assistance Fund (HAF)

- Federal emergency program to assist families behind on mortgage and other home-related expenses due to the pandemic
- Not yet available – likely this Fall!

Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB)

- Eligibility: You qualify for Lifeline, free/reduced school lunch, your provider's existing low income or COVID-19 program, have had a substantial loss in income since March 2020 and income under \$99K for single or \$198K for joint filers, or are a Pell Grant recipient
- Benefits: Up to \$50/month toward your internet bill and \$100 broadband device discount, with \$10-\$50 co-payment
- Apply

Measures to Alleviate Utility Poverty and Improve Accessibility and Affordability

- Expand low income household access to free residential energy efficiency programming. These include weatherization and home, health, and safety measures.
- Work with water utilities to develop new customer assistance programs and improve affordability of existing programs.
- Advocacy partnerships – develop new and strengthen existing – communicating with an expansive network to share resources and consolidate support.

How to Advocate for Change

- Attend and testify (or help others do so) at water board meetings, city council meetings, and public input hearings before the Public Utility Commission.
- Distribute information on how successful programs are working.
- Write op-eds and articles - share your story.
- Challenge rate increases and customer service in court on behalf of affected neighbors or clients.
- **If your community or organization is subject to restrictions, PULP may be able to help you advocate with the utility for change.**

Utility Affordability – Positive Impacts

- Improved living conditions for low income communities and communities of color
 - Paying less for utilities leaves income available for food, medicine, and other necessities
- Improved building stock
 - Weatherization and health and safety repairs result in healthier buildings/healthier residents
- Improved housing stability
 - Results in improved neighborhood stability, and reduced eviction and foreclosure
- Greater access to work opportunities and communication with loved ones
 - Telephone and internet service are essential for daily life



Image Description: A group of utility services, like electricity and heat, surrounding and connecting to a happy and healthy home.

Thank you!

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