

**Maryland Office of People's Counsel**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> ALERT**

**Please warn your clients about utility-related scams**

OPC is receiving more inquiries about bogus phone calls and door knocks from people claiming they are working for/contacting you on behalf of the local utility. Some of these appear to be third party agents for energy suppliers; the phone calls also are attempts to scam customers out of money by threatening service shut offs. Some people are reporting phone calls from what appear to be local utility numbers – they are cloning the utility numbers. Please pass this alert on to your staff and clients.

**Important TIPS for utility customers:** Do not turn over any identifying information (SSNs, Account #s, Utility Choice ID #s) over the phone or to someone at your door. If they are selling something, get the name of the company, the agent and ask for written materials or a website to check the information. A utility representative will not ask for this information, will not ask for payment over the phone, and must have utility ID at your door. Even for a utility employee, you can always call your utility and check to see if an employee is scheduled to come to your home.

If you or a customer is the victim of a scam, contact the utility and if a money scam, also contact the police.

Utility customers are the latest targets of scammers. Gas, electricity and water are essential services – we all need heat/cooling, light and water in our daily lives. The scammers take advantage of this need, and threaten loss of utility service if they do not get payment. The scammers can be very sophisticated, and many people end up sending money to the scammers, instead of using it for their real utility bills. Some of the scams are actually tricks to get a customer to turn over personal information – often done through text messages. This operates in much the same way as the IRS scams.

The scammers contact customers by phone, email and at the door. They claim to be from the utility, and often have legitimate-looking uniforms and ID. They warn of utility shut offs if immediate payments are not made. Customers are directed to purchase prepaid debit cards such as Green Dot or Money Pak and give the card number to the caller. Once the scammer gets the money, there is no way to get it back.

Please alert your clients about these potential scams. A few customers have contacted our agency about attempted fraud, and we do know that this is a national problem. The important thing is customer awareness. If a customer is behind on a bill, she will receive written notices about past due payments and eventually, a notice of upcoming service termination if a bill remains unpaid. Maryland utilities will not contact customers with these tactics – and will not tell customers to purchase prepaid debit cards for bill payment. Customers should always contact their utility, using the numbers provided by the utility, if they have any question about the legitimacy of a call, home visit, email or text message about overdue bills, meter appointments or the selling of other services. You also can find more information about these scams at [www.utilitiesunited.org](http://www.utilitiesunited.org).

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