

STATE OF NEW YORK

8983

IN SENATE

May 3, 2022

Introduced by Sen. PARKER -- read twice and ordered printed, and when printed to be committed to the Committee on Energy and Telecommunications

AN ACT to amend the public service law, in relation to requiring the establishment of automatic payment plans

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

1 Section 1. The public service law is amended by adding a new section
2 66-t to read as follows:

3 § 66-t. Utility automatic payment plans. 1. Within one hundred eighty
4 days of the effective date of this section, notwithstanding any other
5 provision of law, the commission is authorized and directed to require
6 investor owned combination utility companies headquartered in New York
7 to establish a statewide program to provide eligible participants with
8 affordability payment plans. Investor owned combination utility compa-
9 nies shall automatically provide appropriate payment plans to qualifying
10 low income individuals who provide documentation of their eligibility
11 status. The fiscal impact of such a program shall not be borne by
12 customers and shall not be added to bills rendered by the investor owned
13 combination utility company to customers. Enrollment shall be available
14 at any time during the year. For the purposes of this section, "combina-
15 tion utility company" shall mean a utility company that provides elec-
16 tric, gas, or steam service.

17 2. (a) The commission shall engage with investor owned combination
18 utility companies to establish automated file matching mechanisms that
19 will provide, via electronic means, investor owned combination utility
20 companies with a list of eligible participants within the utility compa-
21 ny's service territory. The commission shall provide such information to
22 such utility companies no less than semi-annually. An investor owned
23 combination utility company which offers such a payment plan program
24 shall conspicuously advertise the availability of such plan on the
25 website of such utility company.

26 (b) The commission shall also create a mechanism by which an individ-
27 ual's documentation is submitted and reasonably and promptly reviewed

EXPLANATION--Matter in italics (underscored) is new; matter in brackets
[-] is old law to be omitted.

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1 for qualification as proper documentation of the individual's eligibil-
2 ity status. Such mechanism shall also provide for electronic submission
3 of documentation.

4 3. An individual or household shall be determined to be eligible for a
5 payment plan if such individual or household provides documentation of
6 eligibility for any of the following programs:

7 (a) temporary assistance for needy families (family assistance);

8 (b) safety net assistance (public assistance);

9 (c) supplemental security income (SSI);

10 (d) supplemental nutrition assistance program (SNAP);

11 (e) low income home energy assistance program;

12 (f) veteran's disability pension;

13 (g) veteran's surviving spouse pension;

14 (h) child health plus;

15 (i) lifeline;

16 (j) home energy assistance program (HEAP);

17 (k) direct vendor or utility guarantee;

18 (l) temporary assistance to needy families (TANF);

19 (m) social security disability insurance (SSDI);

20 (n) emergency rental assistance program (ERAP); and

21 (o) any other income-based assistance program identified by the
22 commission.

23 4. (a) When devising payment plans, the utility company shall consider
24 the circumstances and financial condition of the customer including:

25 (i) The amount due, if any, on the account;

26 (ii) The customer's ability to pay;

27 (iii) The customer's payment history;

28 (iv) The anticipated energy assistance benefits for which the customer
29 may be eligible;

30 (v) The circumstances which resulted in the past due bills;

31 (vi) Hardships which may result from the lack of utility service to
32 the customer; and

33 (vii) Any other relevant factors related to the circumstances of the
34 customer.

35 (b) An investor-owned combination utility company shall permit each
36 customer a period of not less than twenty-one days from the date the
37 bill was sent to pay in full, unless the customer and the utility agree
38 on a different due date. A utility shall not withdraw funds from a
39 customer's account before the due date in cases where a customer uses an
40 automatic bill payment plan unless the customer agrees to a different
41 period.

42 5. The attorney general may bring a civil action against any investor
43 owned combination utility companies that violate this section to enjoin
44 such violation and may recover a civil penalty of up to one hundred
45 dollars per violation of this section or, for a pattern or practice of
46 such violations, of up to one thousand dollars per violation. A
47 violation shall be judged per individual account.

48 § 2. This act shall take effect immediately.