

# Form 8: How to Resolve Utility Bill Problems Checklist

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## ● Know Your Rights

Make sure you are familiar with your rights. In addition to **Chapter 6: Utilities** in *Legal Tactics: Tenants' Rights in Massachusetts*, go to: [www.MassLegalHelp.org](http://www.MassLegalHelp.org) for more information about your utility rights. Another helpful resource is a book called *The Right to Light (and heat) Handbook*. You can order it for \$6 from Massachusetts Continuing Legal Education, Inc. (MCLE) at 617-482-2205 or 800-966-MCLE (outside of Boston.) This book is still the most comprehensive guide available.

## ● Gather all Relevant Information

Make sure you have all the documents you need, such as:

- Your most recent utility bills,
- Doctor's letter or other medical documents for cases involving serious illness,
- Birth certificates for cases involving infant protections, and
- Household budget information, if you want to arrange a payment plan.

## ● Call the Utility Company

In many cases, a utility company will resolve a problem to your satisfaction. If it doesn't, always ask the company to protect your service until the dispute is resolved. If your service has not already been shut off, it cannot be shut off while a dispute is pending.

## ● Call the Department of Public Utilities (DPU)

If a utility company does not resolve the dispute to your satisfaction, call the Department of Public Utilities (DPU) at 800-392-6066 or 617-305-3531. The person who initially answers the phone is called a consumer coordinator. This person will try to get the relevant information from you, answer questions, and negotiate a solution acceptable to you and the company. If the consumer coordinator is not able to resolve the problem, try seeking help from a Consumer Division supervisor. **Note:** The DPU often refuses to get involved in a dispute unless the company has already had a chance to respond to the customer's complaint.

## ● Request a DPU Hearing

If the problem is not resolved to your satisfaction by a DPU consumer coordinator, you can request an informal hearing at the DPU. At this hearing, a DPU hearing officer will ask you to present your side of the story, and the company will present its side. The hearing officer will then make a decision.

## ● Appeal the DPU Decision

Either, you or the utility company, can *appeal* the decision reached at an informal DPU hearing by requesting a formal hearing. The formal hearing is run more like a court hearing—witnesses are sworn, evidence is formally admitted, and legal arguments are made. Before appealing a decision to a formal hearing, you should get advice from a lawyer or a community action organization.