

I am behind on my utility bills. Is there anything I can do?

Yes, you can apply for Emergency Assistance. Emergency Assistance is not the same thing as HEAP. During HEAP season, you must apply for regular and then emergency HEAP before you can apply for Emergency Assistance.

How much Emergency Assistance can I get?

Most people can get help with the last four (4) months' worth of utility bills. If you get SSI or Temporary Assistance, you will get the most recent four (4) months in which you received service from the 10 months before your application. If you have SSI, DSS will also give you a six (6) month guarantee of service. This means that DSS will guarantee active service for six months after the application. You are responsible to pay the bill during this time, but if you don't, DSS will pay it for you.

Can I get help even if I am not on Public Assistance?

Yes, you do not have to be on Public Assistance to get help with Emergency Assistance. There is no income limit for Emergency Assistance for utilities.

Where do I apply for Emergency Assistance?

1. If you are receiving Temporary Assistance, see your case worker.
2. If you are not getting Temporary Assistance, you can apply at 460 Main Street, 2nd Floor, Buffalo, New York.

What do I need to bring with me when I apply for Emergency Assistance?

You must bring the following papers:

1. A disconnect notice;
2. A financial statement from the utility company;
3. A photo ID for each person over the age of 18 in your household (these people must also be present at DSS);
4. Proof of income;
5. Proof of resources;
6. Proof of expenses:
 - a. proof of housing costs; rent receipts/lease/landlord statement, mortgage statements;
 - b. other utility bills;
 - c. if you own a car, proof of your car payments and insurance costs;
 - d. out-of-pocket medical expenses, such as prescription co-pays;
 - e. child care expenses.

What if I cannot get all the documents DSS is asking for?

If you cannot get all the documents but have tried your best to get them, tell your caseworker. DSS has a duty to assist you in getting all the required documentation.

How do I get the financial statement from the utility company?

If your emergency is a gas emergency, you should go to the National Fuel office at 409 Main Street, Buffalo, New York with:

1. Proof of income (for at least the past 30 days of wages, SSI, UIB, etc.);
2. Identification;
3. Proof of expenses.

National Fuel will decide whether they will offer you a payment plan (called a *deferred payment arrangement* or *DPA*). If they offer you a DPA, you won't need Emergency Assistance. If they deny your request for a DPA, they will write that on a financial statement for you to take to DSS.

If your emergency is an electric emergency, you can ask for the Financial Statement from your electric company. You will have to call National Grid at (800) 642-4272 or NYSEG at (800) 572-1111 to get your financial statement. If National Grid denies your request for a Deferred Payment Agreement, they will provide that information directly to DSS so that you can apply for Emergency Assistance at DSS.

How long will the application take?

You must be screened on the day you apply. This means that the Department of Social Services has to talk to you to see whether you have a disconnect notice scheduled for disconnection within 72 hours or your utilities are already shut off. If you are in that situation, the Department of Social Services must give you the help the same day you apply, get a hold on your utility account until they are able to give you an appointment, or give you a denial in writing.

What if I am sanctioned from Temporary Assistance?

You can still get help. Sanctions do not apply to Emergency Assistance for utilities.

What if DSS denies my application?

If your application is denied you should get a written notice. You can call our office and we can review the notice with you. We may agree to take your case. You can call us at (716) 847-0650 and ask for the Health and Economic Security Unit. You also have the right to request a fair hearing if you disagree with the denial.

How do I request a Fair Hearing?

You request a Fair Hearing:

By Phone:

Statewide Toll-free 1-800-342-3334: Fair Hearing Requests & Inquiries

By Mail:

New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA)
Office of Administrative Hearings
P.O. Box 1930 Albany, New York 12201-1930

By Fax

Fax No. (518) 473-6735

Online:

Forms: <http://www.otda.state.ny.us/oah.forms.asp>