

# Texans Unable to Pay Rent and Utility Bills Get Emergency Relief

Advocacy groups have been pressuring the state's utility regulator to suspend water, phone and electric shutoffs as workers face layoffs and may not be able to pay bills

By Eva Parks • Published 3 hours ago • Updated 2 hours ago



Texans unable to pay utility bills are one step closer to getting relief as thousands apply for unemployment benefits at a record pace across the state.

This morning, the Public Utility Commission held a special meeting to approve a new order in response to the COVID-19 crisis, in the context of state and federal declarations of emergency disaster.

This is a big move as advocacy groups have been pressuring the state's utility regulator to suspend water, phone and electric shutoffs as workers face layoffs and may not be able to pay bills.

Just last week, The Texas Supreme Court issued an order that puts a stay on evictions for non-payment of rent until after April 19. There is a limited exception for an eviction based on a person posing an imminent threat of



physical harm to another resident or the rental property's staff, or for criminal activity. The order applies statewide.

Courts may accept new filings, but citation will not be served until after April 19, and the time periods associated with the filings are suspended. Similarly, courts may issue writs of possession, but writs will not be executed until after April 26.

If you're a renter, the Texas Apartment Association has gathered a list of resources on their website:  
<https://www.taa.org/renters/helpful-info/>

Companies like TXU and Reliant Energy say they're working hard to help customers and offering payment flexibility, waiving late fees and offering bill payment assistance.

The Public Utility Commission has not released the exact details of the order but in a memo released yesterday, DeAnn Walker, Chairman of the commission, recommended that utility regulators should immediately provide help for financially distressed Texans who buy electricity in the deregulated market, an area that includes Houston and Dallas.

**Read memo here:**

<http://interchange.puc.texas.gov/Search/Documents?controlNumber=50664&itemNumber=85>

The cost of the program would be paid through a special charge assessed to ratepayers.

If you're having issues with your utility company or landlord, NBC 5 Responds is here to help. Please visit:  
<https://www.nbcdfw.com/consumer-form/>