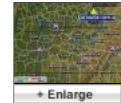




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Get Help Paying Your Utility Bills

Various Agencies Help Public Pay Cable, Phone, Gas, Electric Bills

Reported By Marc Stewart

POSTED: 3:12 pm CDT May 6, 2009
UPDATED: 6:27 pm CDT May 6, 2009



NASHVILLE, Tenn. -- Many members of the community are continuing to struggle to pay their bills during the weak economy. Basic services like phone and electric bills are putting a strain on people who have never experienced this type of problem.

But the public should be aware that there is help available for those in need.

Asking for help isn't easy for Nashville resident Jerry Graves. He had a good job, lost it and is struggling to find a new one.

He went to the Metro Action Commission looking for aid to help pay his electric bill. Not only can the agency help people pay their Nashville Electric Service bill, customers from Piedmont Gas and other power services can also get assistance.

"Families still use propane, coal or wood in order to heat their homes. We also offer assistance on that. We pay the supplier," said Lisa Gallon of the Metro Action Commission.

Another challenge for residents these days is paying for phone service.

The Tennessee Regulatory Authority offers two programs called Link-Up and Lifeline that can help people get phone service at a reduced rate, depending on their finances.

On Wednesday, AT&T said it "will work one-on-one with customers to evaluate their plans and options, and will work together on a solution that fits their needs."

The requests for help are not stopping. Experts said if they are having trouble paying any of their bills, the person should be upfront and let the provider know.

"They have to know there's an issue. We don't encourage anyone to not pay at all. We encourage you to talk to your providers. They're here to help," said Gallon.

When it comes to cable and Internet service, in most cases, there is also room for negotiating with the provider.

A spokesperson for Comcast cable said decisions are made on a case-by-case basis and people struggling to pay their bill should contact their call center if help is needed.

Every county in the state has what is known as an action commission to help people pay their bills.

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