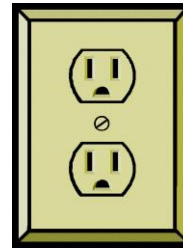




Rhode Island Utility Consumer Rights



2017

**Find out about your rights and ways to get involved,
to make sure all Rhode Islanders have access
to the basic needs of water, heat, light and electricity.**

[by the George Wiley Center, 2017]

George Wiley Center

32 East Ave, Pawtucket, RI 02860

office: 401-728-5555

georgewileycenterri@gmail.com georgewileycenter.org



Organizing for social and economic justice

Our Roots: Founded in 1981 by longtime anti-poverty activist, Henry Shelton, the organization is named for Rhode Islander George Wiley who was a leader in the Civil and Welfare Rights movements.

Our Mission: The George Wiley Center organizes statewide for policy changes that achieve social and economic justice in Rhode Island.

Our Work: With dozens of concrete victories over the years, we work to strengthen access, affordability, and democracy in areas of basic need and dignified quality of life. Issues of focus include: utility access, SNAP benefits, school breakfast, living wages, unemployment, youth jobs, and other struggles to eliminate poverty.

Your Voice: The George Wiley Center’s strength lies in the collective voices of people standing together for a more humane and just society. With years of experience, we are able to offer immediate practical support to individuals, while also relying on each other to mobilize for action and advocate for changes in public policy.

Your Support: As a grassroots group (501c3 nonprofit), any support is greatly appreciated! From financial donations to volunteering, we deeply thank our network of caring supporters for your contributions.

Contact Us: *Facing utility shut-off or other issues of economic injustice? Interested in getting involved, attending a meeting, or scheduling a presentation?*

George Wiley Center: 32 East Avenue, Pawtucket, RI 02860
 office: 401-728-5555 georgewileycenterri@gmail.com georgewileycenter.org



outside the Division of Public Utilities in Warwick, RI

The George Wiley Center is a grassroots group pushing for social & economic justice through policy change, with a focus on utility access and other issues affecting low-income households. Through organizing, we connect people’s individual problems to policy issues that we can constructively challenge together. Public officials, service providers and legislators need to hear directly from utility consumers in order to foster public accountability and achieve improved utility access.

As we continue to coordinate, strategize, and speak up against injustices, it is important to know our:

Rhode Island Utility Consumer Rights, 2017

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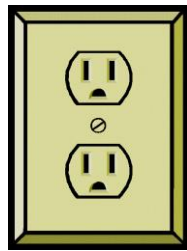
Utility Access is a Basic Need

Utility services help provide many of our daily requirements, they are integral to adequate housing and a well-functioning society. As we move toward future and renewable utility systems, it is important to recognize that utilities are basic needs.



Water

Water is one of the most basic needs required for survival. Access to clean and affordable water should be a top priority for humane public policy.



Heat, Light, and Electricity

Heat, light, and electricity help provide a wide range of daily needs. These include warmth, sanitation, hygiene, food storage, food preparation, medication refrigeration, visibility, fans, air conditioning, power for medical equipment, communication, education, information, safety, and many other elements that give our homes and communities life and livability.

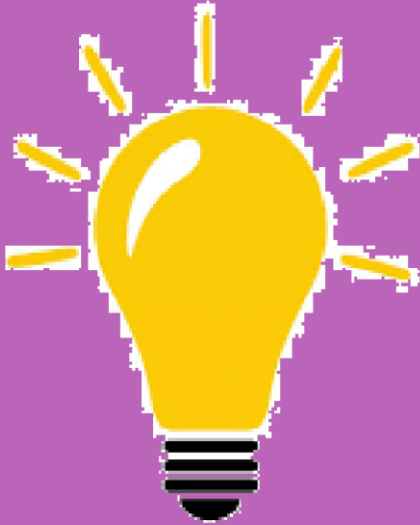


Inside a hearing for GWC's proposed Restoration Regulation, PUC, Warwick



In front of the truck we drove to Flint, MI, delivering water & solidarity from RI

STOP THE SHUT-OFF CRISIS in Rhode Island



- > In 2016 over 27,000 shut-offs imposed (electric + gas)
- > Shocking numbers for a state of 1 million
- > And National Grid made over \$ 4 billion profit that year

Affordable Utility Access is a BASIC NEED
Stop Shut-offs <=> Support PIPP
(Percentage Income Payment Plan)

organize together : georgewileycenter.org

The Negative Impact of Shut-offs

Shut-offs imposed on water, heat, or electric utilities have immediate and lasting harmful consequences, both to individuals and communities. More than a mere inconvenience, daily life becomes a struggle without access to utility service.

No water means no life, and although bottled water may be available, this is not a viable longterm replacement to clean and reliable water access. Without heat, extreme cold can lead to **sickness, medical complications, or even death**. Without cooling or fans, extreme heat can cause the same tragic outcomes. With electric services terminated, food goes bad, refrigerated medicine goes bad, meals can't be properly prepared, personal hygiene becomes difficult, people can't see in the dark, students can't study, wheelchairs and medical equipment can't be charged, and access to communication and information is severely hindered.

The experiences of Rhode Islanders who have lived through days, weeks, and even months lacking utility service should be listened to, so future policies will decrease the inhumane practice of utility shut-offs.

"I am 77 years old and I have had my gas and electricity shut off for over 2 months. I can't use my nebulizer when I don't have electricity. I have been unable to take a warm shower in 2 months. It is important to have reasonable payment plans especially for senior citizens who are fragile and in poor health. I take medications for my thyroid condition and I have severe asthma and use a nebulizer. I haven't been able to use my nebulizer so I have had more difficulties breathing."

-- A., Providence

"It's really very hard. They shut off my electric and I had to go to a friend's house. Looking for help is hard. I tried to call, they won't listen. I have little kids in the house. I can't work 40 hours a week with 3 little kids. We are living in the cold. We have nothing to cook with. I have to go outside to cook on the grill. It's really tough. It breaks my heart. They don't care."

-- F., Pawtucket

"I did get shut off when they knew I had a daughter with special needs, I couldn't pay the bill and they didn't want to hear it. I'm trying to sacrifice and make a living and taking care of my daughter. With all her medical needs, it's a life-threatening issue, it's messed up that they don't care about her, when she needs electricity to stay alive. When I was shut off they wanted a big chunk and I couldn't afford it. We ended up having to move because we couldn't afford to keep living where we were. We went from being home owners to having to rent, and now that property we used to own is abandoned and being broken into, which is bad for the whole community."

-- J., Providence

Checklist for Utility Access

(not necessarily in order)

- ✓ **Discuss your account with the utility provider**, try to negotiate when needed, record details
- ✓ Call or visit your local CAP agency to **see if you qualify for LIHEAP** (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program)
- ✓ Ask at the CAP about an energy audit, the free or discounted **Weatherization Assistance Program(WAP)**, and other programs available to low-income renters and home owners
- ✓ If you have a high back bill and are facing shut-off, ask the CAP about possible enrollment in the **AMP (Arrearage Management Plan)**, which forgives high balances for low-income households
- ✓ If someone in your household is **disabled or seriously ill**, have your doctor **fill out the medical protection form** (available from the utility or at <http://tinyurl.com/GWC-med-protections>), to offer some protection from shut-off
- ✓ If **all members of your household are over 62**, there is an **infant under 2** in a low-income household, or if you are **unemployed**, contact the utility to **file that info, which offers some protection** from shut-off
- ✓ If facing shut-off or unable to reach a satisfactory agreement with the utility company, call the **Division of Public Utilities to schedule a hearing** (this prevents shut-off until hearing process is complete)
- ✓ If you do not agree with the outcome at the Division informal hearing, **consider appealing for a formal review, and if necessary to the RI Superior Court**
- ✓ For further information, a **possible advocate** to attend your Division hearing, or to **get involved in organizing** for affordable and fair utility service, contact the **George Wiley Center!**



Know Your Utility Rights

Utility Consumers of Rhode Island have the following rights under state law and the Rules and Regulations of the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) and Division of Public Utilities and Carriers (Division), which have the *“jurisdiction to grant an exception to the provision of these regulations to any party for good cause shown.”* Part VI, Sect 7

The **George Wiley Center** encourages RI utility consumers to know and exercise our rights, to demand that the PUC and the Division use their authority to ensure:

- 1 – The right, for ALL, to both an informal hearing and a formal hearing before an impartial Division Hearing Officer. Utility shut-offs are prohibited until this hearing process is complete.
- 2 – The right to appeal the final Division hearing decision to Superior Court.
- 3 – The right to an affordable payment plan. The Division has the authority to order payment terms which are less stringent than the applicable Residential Payment Plan.
- 4 – The right to protection from utility shut-off when a customer is seriously ill or disabled.
- 5 – The right for any infant under the age of 24 months to be protected from a utility shut-off.
- 6 – The right for a “protected” class of customers to maintain their gas and electric utility services during the Winter Moratorium from November 1st through April 15th. (Protected status for those who are disabled, LIHEAP recipients, seriously ill, unemployed, households with all over 62 years or children under 2 years.)
- 7 – The right to proper representation from the Consumer Unit of the Attorney General’s Office.

Consumers must provide written documentation of their circumstances.

It is important to know your rights and let others know too. Often, consumers calling the utility company or the Division of Public Utilities are not informed or are misinformed of their utility consumer rights.

Protected Status

Protected utility customers are “protected” from utility shut-offs between November 1st and April 15th (the “Winter Moratorium”), while others have some protections from shut-offs year-round. Contact the utility company to **make sure your protected status is on file and up to date.**

You qualify as a protected customer if you are:

- Unemployed
- In a household where all members are over 62 years
- In a household with a disabled person
- Qualified & signed up for LIHEAP funding
- In a household with a member who is seriously ill
- Experiencing a financial hardship or in a domestic dispute
- In a household with a child under 2 years old, with financial hardship

Utility shut-offs are not allowed ...

- when the National Weather Service has issued a heat advisory warning for RI
- on Fridays, weekends, or the day before a holiday, and only between 8am-4pm
- if there is an infant under 24 months in a household with financial hardship
- if a disconnection will directly result in death or a serious illness (unless permission is granted by the Division of Public Utilities)
- whenever the customer initiates a request for an “informal hearing” or “review” of a dispute with the utility company through the RI Division of Public Utilities. This is a temporary freeze on shut-offs that lasts through the informal appeal and formal hearing process.
- if there is a domestic dispute and the wage earning partner is moving out

Find the rest of the rules at the PUC website ripuc.org

Contact the George Wiley Center for support in exercising your rights, or to be part of a “Know Your Utility Rights” presentation:
office: 401-728-5555 georgewileycenter.org

RI Low Income Guidelines

60% RI Median Income (2018)

LIHEAP (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program)

WAP (Weatherization Assistance Program)

AMP (Appliance Management Program)

Family Size	1 Month Income	1 Year Income	
1	\$2,424	\$29,080	
2	\$3,169	\$38,027	
3	\$3,915	\$46,975	
4	\$4,661	\$55,922	
5	\$5,406	\$64,870	
6	\$6,152	\$73,818	
7	\$6,292	\$75,495	
8	\$6,432	\$77,173	

75% RI Median Income (2017)

“Financial Hardship Category”

to file with Utility Company for Service Protection (ex. Households with Infants under 2 yrs old, winter moratorium on utility shut-offs)

Family Size	1 Month Income	1 Year Income
1	\$2,972	\$35,666
2	\$3,887	\$46,641
3	\$4,801	\$57,615
4	\$5,716	\$68,589
5	\$6,630	\$79,563
6	\$7,545	\$90,537
7	\$7,716	\$92,595
8	\$7,888	\$94,653

LIHEAP

(Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program)

Federal funds are available through the state to assist low-income residents with the cost of heating. Call or visit your local CAP agency for more information on applying for LIHEAP.

LIHEAP Documentation Needed to Apply for Assistance:

- Valid photo ID for all members of household over 18 years of age
 - Social Security Cards for all members of household
 - Birth certificates for all children under 18 years living in household
 - Proof of residency (Lease/ Rent receipts/ Mortgage/ Property Taxes)
 - Copy of recent utility bill for primary heat source
 - If employed, income documentation for 4 consecutive weeks of employment
 - If self-employed, submit recent Federal Tax Returns
 - Rental income (for all household members over 18 years of age)
 - If receiving other assistance, award letters for assistance programs (SNAP / SSI / Unemployment / Private Pensions / Court Ordered Child Support)
 - College or High School schedule for any students over 18 years of age living in household
 - Adults over 18 with no income must provide a notarized letter stating they have no income
 - Signed LIHEAP Application
- Undocumented residents are not eligible for LIHEAP benefits.*

Contact the George Wiley Center for other issues or if you want to get involved in making sure all Rhode Islanders have access to utilities:



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Arrearage Management Plan

(Originally called the "Henry Shelton Plan")

FOR LOW-INCOME UTILITY CONSUMERS

Debt relief program for high back bill balances

The **Henry Shelton Act** was signed into Rhode Island law in 2011. It was named after **Henry Shelton, founder of the George Wiley Center**, a grassroots group that for decades has advocated for the rights of low-income utility consumers and fought for the basic necessity of affordable utility service.

The Henry Shelton Act mandates a debt forgiveness program to allow forgiveness on the total balance owed for LIHEAP eligible (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program) utility consumers. If your utility service (gas or electric) has been or is scheduled to be terminated and you have a high total balance owed, you may qualify for this arrears forgiveness payment plan, now known as the **Arrearage Management Plan (AMP)**.

Contact your local Community Action Agency to find out if your household is LIHEAP eligible, to enroll in the AMP by paying zero down if you are not yet shut off and no more than 25% down if already shut off. The program lasts one year, with monthly payments based on monthly averages from the previous year, and a portion of the back bill forgiven each month up to \$1,500 in a year. Continuing enrollment for subsequent years is possible for higher back bills, as is re-enrollment for those who default (after 2 years) and re-enrollment for those who had defaulted on the previous Henry Shelton Plan. If eligible, this is a great opportunity to prevent utility termination and catch up on your bills. The Act also protects LIHEAP households from shut-offs if the total balance owed is under \$300.

The Henry Shelton Act also established the **Ratepayers Advisory Board**, a group of consumer representatives from various sectors, including low-income Rhode Islanders. Open monthly meetings are held at the Public Utilities Commission (89 Jefferson Blvd, Warwick), with public comment welcome, to raise concerns and discuss utility-related issues.

Details of the **Arrearage Management Plan (AMP)**:

(formerly known as the **Henry Shelton Plan**)

- **Available to LIHEAP eligible households** (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program) in Rhode Island. Contact your local Community Action Agency to find out if you qualify for LIHEAP and the Arrearage Management Plan (AMP).
- **If you are shut off or facing shut-off, get restored or maintain** gas and electric service by using this program.
- Allows **zero down payment of total utility bill owed** to enroll in program if service still on, down payment no higher than 25% if service shut off.
- Offers **monthly forgiveness of back bill up to \$1,500 during a year** long program, with additional year(s) enrollment available for higher balances.
- **Monthly payments based on average monthly use** from the previous year.
- **Re-enrollment available**, both for those who had previously defaulted on the Henry Shelton Plan and going forward if defaults occur on the AMP program. This will allow those who are un-enrolled due to missed payments the ability to re-enroll again after a 2 year period. It is important to spread the word to many who defaulted on the previous Henry Shelton Plan that the newer Arrearage Management Plan (AMP) is now available and open to all who are eligible.

*Although this is the best payment/forgiveness plan available, it is important to be aware of the above details. Check with the utility company for additional information on your account. **For more information and ways to get involved** in our efforts to improve utility access in Rhode Island, please contact the **George Wiley Center**:*

32 East Ave, Pawtucket, RI 02860

office: 401-728-5555

georgewileycenterri@gmail.com

www.georgewileycenter.org

Rhode Island Phone Numbers

Attorney General (Consumer Protection Unit): 401-274-4400

DHS (Dept. of Human Services): 401-462-5300

Disability Law Project: 401-831-3150

Division of Elderly Affairs: 401-462-3000

Division of Public Utilities (to request an informal hearing): 401-780-9700

DLT (Dept of Labor & Training, Unemployment Insurance): 401-243-9100

George Wiley Center (utility justice advocacy & organizing): 401-728-5555

Keep the Heat On (utility assistance, Catholic Diocese of RI): 401-721-7833

National Grid (Customer Service Gas & Electric): 800-322-3223

Operation Stand Down (for Veterans): 401-383-4730

Project Hope: 401-728-0515

RI Coalition for the Homeless: 401-721-5685

RI Community Food Bank: 401-942-6325

RI Housing Help Center: 401-457-1130

RI Legal Services: 401-274-2652

Society of St.Vincent de Paul (refer to local conference): 401-490-0822

United Way 2-1-1: 211

URI SNAP Outreach: 866-306-0270

Veterans Inc.: 800-482-2565

RI Community Action Agencies

(also known as CAPs)

Contact your local agency to apply for LIHEAP (Low Income Energy Assistance Program), AMP (Arrearage Management), Weatherization (free or discounted), and other assistance for low-income households:

Blackstone Valley Community Action Program

32 Goff Avenue, Pawtucket, RI 02860 **401-723-4520** | www.bvcap.org
(Pawtucket, Central Falls, Lincoln, Cumberland, Woonsocket)

Comprehensive Community Action

311 Doric Avenue, Cranston, RI 02910 **401-467-9610** | www.comcap.org
(Cranston, Foster, Scituate, Coventry)

Eastbay Community Action - Upper Bay Region

100 Bullocks Point Avenue, Riverside, RI **401-437-1000** | www.ebcap.org
(East Providence, Barrington, Warren, Bristol)

Eastbay Community Action - Lower Bay Region

19 Broadway, Newport, RI **401-847-7821** | www.ebcap.org
(Portsmouth, Middletown, Newport, Jamestown, Tiverton, Little Compton)

Community Care Alliance

PO Box 1700, Woonsocket, RI 02895 **401-235-7000** | www.CommunityCareRI.org
(Woonsocket)

Community Action Partnership of Providence

518 Hartford Avenue, Providence, RI 02909 **401-273-2000** | www.cappri.org
(Providence)

Tri-Town Community Action Agency

1126 Hartford Avenue, Johnston, RI 02919 **401-351-2750** | www.tri-town.org
(N. Providence, Johnston, N. Smithfield, Smithfield, Burrillville, Glocester)

South County Community Action Agency

1935 Kingstown Road, Wakefield, RI 02879 **401-789-3016** | www.sccainc.org
(Exeter, Charlestown, Narragansett, Westerly, Hopkinton, North Kingstown, South Kingstown, Richmond, West Greenwich, New Shoreham)

Westbay Community Action Partnership

224 Buttonwoods Avenue, Warwick, RI 02886 **401-732-4660** | www.westbaycap.org
(Warwick, West Warwick, East Greenwich)

Representing Yourself at an Informal Hearing at the Division of Public Utilities

(89 Jefferson Blvd, Warwick, RI)

It is your right as a utility customer to have a hearing at the Division of Public Utilities if you are facing shut-off or have another issue you are not able to resolve with the utility company. If you receive a shut-off notice, by requesting an informal hearing you will be protected from shut-off until after the hearing. This will give you some time to make your case before the Division and to consider next steps to avoid shut-off.

1) Call the Division of Public Utilities (401-780-9700, 89 Jefferson Blvd, Warwick RI 02888) and request an “informal hearing.” If you are denied or discouraged from exercising your right to a hearing, ask on what legal terms you are being denied. Request a bilingual hearing officer if needed. Write down the time you called and name of the person you spoke to. In most cases you will receive the date of the hearing in the mail, be sure to cancel if your issue is resolved beforehand or if you are unable to attend.

2) Call the George Wiley Center (401-728-5555) to see if a volunteer is able to accompany you at the hearing. Also, ask supportive family members, friends, doctor, your elected officials, etc. to attend your hearing or offer letters of support. It is possible to attend a hearing on your own, but having friends, family, or allies in attendance can be beneficial.

3) Start making some kind of payment before your hearing, even a small amount. This will show a good faith effort when your payment history is discussed at the hearing.

4) Put together a “monthly budget”, the amount of your income minus all the bills that must be paid. (Ex. Rent, food, medication, gas or oil, electricity, other utilities, etc.) The George Wiley Center has an example monthly budget form you can use. Bring this and any other documentation (bills, medical records, etc.) with you to the hearing. At the hearing the Division is able to change your payment plan based on what is actually affordable for your household, so it is important to educate the hearing officials about the details of your situation.

5) Prepare to tell your story, your special circumstances, including personal hardship such as unemployment, medical issues, children, divorce, etc. Let the Division hear what it is like to be you, to not have enough to afford your high payment plans for utilities that you can't live without. Be prepared for the utility company representative to have a history of your payments, including missed and defaulted. Document all attempts you have made to request assistance, and if it they were denied, such as LIHEAP, Salvation Army, churches, etc. Make notes of your narrative ahead of time.

6) On the day of the hearing, arrive early to meet with your supporters beforehand. Shut off cell phones and tuck them away during the hearing.

7) Share your story, monthly budget, and individual hardship circumstances with the Division. Tell them you want to pay the bills and what you can afford. **Take notes**, including names of those who are present.

8) Do not make a deal at the hearing unless you really can afford the payments. Make sure the Hearing Officer tells you they have up to thirty days to make a decision on a payment plan.

9) Stay in contact with the George Wiley Center, update us as soon as you get the written response from the Division. **If the informal hearing does not result in an adequate outcome, you may request a formal hearing to appeal the decision**, and you will continue to be protected from termination until the formal hearing. You have a right to appeal a formal hearing decision to Superior Court.

10) Attend meetings and actions to strengthen protections and improve policies that impact all RI utility consumers. **Together we are stronger!**



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Household Monthly Budget

For your use, when negotiating a payment plan with the utility company or in a hearing at the Division of Public Utilities. This will help you show your monthly budget and assist the Division or utility company in determining a realistic affordable payment plan for your utility bills.

INCOME (include all members of household)	Monthly Average
Work	
SSI (Disability)	
Unemployment	
Social Security	
Child Support	
SNAP benefits	
Private Pensions	
LIHEAP (divide yearly total by 12 = monthly average)	
Rental Income	
Other Income (describe):	
Total Income =	\$

EXPENSES (include all members of household)	Monthly Average
Housing (Rent or Mortgage)	
Utilities (Heat + Electric + Water) *do not include the bill being negotiated*	
Communication/ Information (Phone + Internet + Cable + Newspaper)	
Food (groceries + meals at work/ away from home + school lunches, etc.)	
Family Care (child care, child support, elder care, other support to family members)	
Medical (insurance + medications, co-pays, etc.)	
Transportation (bus pass, taxi, car: gas/payments/insurance/monthly avg. of repairs)	
Debt Repayment (student loans, credit card debt, loan repayments, etc.)	
Taxes (income, property tax, car tax, other taxes)	
School/ Education (tuition, fees, housing, books, classes, tutoring, etc.)	
Clothing + Household (personal care, cleaning supplies, furniture, kitchenware, tools, etc.)	
Community (organization/club/gym/sports membership, church donations, holidays, etc.)	
Other Expenses (describe):	
*Total Expenses = *(not including the bill being negotiated)	\$

Total Income \$ _____	Affordable Monthly Utility Bill
- (minus) Total Expenses \$ _____ =	\$ _____

For more information, or support preparing for your hearing with the Division, please contact us:

George Wiley Center 32 East Ave, Pawtucket, RI 02860
 office: 401-728-5555 georgewileycenterri@gmail.com
 www.georgewileycenter.org

Lifeline Project

The George Wiley Center works to **challenge unfair utility policies that put personal and public health at risk**, including shut-offs on those with disabilities or medical conditions. In 2006 we petitioned for a docket to be opened at the PUC (Public Utilities Commission), to investigate the unfair practice of shutting off those who were presumably protected by doctors' orders. Unfortunately our request was denied as unnecessary. Still, over the coming years we organized with too many who had shut-offs imposed, even those with serious health considerations. We spoke up, believing that such termination procedures were carried out far too often and for far too long, in violation both of common decency and the existing regulations.

Through the **Lifeline Project** the George Wiley Center continued the push to stop shut-offs in medically vulnerable households, **in collaboration since 2015 with the Rhode Island Center for Justice**. We are glad to have been a part of coordinating and co-leading the CFJ's inaugural campaign, and have welcomed their contribution to this effort. At Lifeline organizing meetings we work with utility consumers to learn about your rights, share your story, and find ways we can work together to fight back, to ensure utility service for those with medical conditions.

From our work on the Lifeline Project, **a lawsuit was filed in September, 2015 against National Grid and the Division of Public Utilities**, on behalf of medically vulnerable and/or disabled consumers whose utility service had been terminated. This lawsuit is still being settled and we hope to reach lasting positive changes in practice and procedures, both with the utility company and state agencies that oversee utility termination protections.

As a result of the lawsuit, **we won a consent decree and thousands of vulnerable households have been protected from utility termination** while the case is being settled. New protection forms have been made (ask the utility company or look online) that must be filled out by consumers whose household member(s) have a medical condition or disability. **It is important fill out the form** carefully, and confirm with the utility company that the form has been received and your medical protection/ disability status is on file and up to date. We are currently monitoring the consent decree to ensure we get the most inclusive protections, at the same time advocating against diminishing protections that had previously been won. Contact us if you are directly affected, to learn more, share your story, and get involved.



Power for the People



In front of Superior Court, before filing the lawsuit

Utility Justice Victories!

The George Wiley Center recognizes that utility service is essential for the basic needs of water, heat, light, and electricity. Since our inception in 1981, we have been a leader group in the fight for **Utility Justice**. Though the struggle continues, we are proud of what we have been able to achieve over the years, both locally in Rhode Island and nationally through offering strategy and alliance with other grassroots groups around the country. We hope you will join us to continue to push for more humane utility policies!

Some of what our people power has won so far:

- Educated thousands of Rhode Islanders on how to exercise their rights as utility consumers, through "**Know Your Utility Rights**" meetings, presentations, clinics, and daily individual phone consultations.
- Won **extension of Winter Moratorium**, offering protection from utility shut-offs to vulnerable households during the cold season.
- Won **first in the country, protection from utility termination during heat waves** in the summer.
- Pushed for **passage of the "Henry Shelton Act"** (named for George Wiley Center founder, Henry Shelton), offering affordable down payments and forgiveness on total back utility bills for low-income consumers. **This also created the Ratepayer Advisory Board** for utility consumer input.
- Coordinated annual GWC Statewide Utility Clinic**, gathering under one roof support for low-income consumers on utility issues along with assistance offered by various social service agencies. Sparked and collaborated on subsequent similar clinics, modeled after our Utility Clinic, offered by the utility company and other service organizations.
- Fought for and won **strongest child protection in the country**, utility service protection for households in financial hardship with children under 2 years old.
- Fostered **utility consumers advocating for ourselves and others**, offering support, advice, and solidarity by George Wiley Center community advocates during informal hearings at the Division of Public Utilities.

-Defended **ability of utility consumers to exercise our rights to a hearing at the Division of Public Utilities, with non-lawyer peer supporters or advocates** (if requested and available) in attendance. In 2007 attempts were made to limit attendance to only attorneys, as a response to the George Wiley Center informing consumers of their rights and attending their hearings in support. But the George Wiley Center fought back and we were able to preserve the practice of non-attorney supportive attendees in the interest of broader democracy and empowering access to consumer rights.

-Won **discounted Electric & Gas Rates** for low-income households.

-Challenged the Division of Public Utilities to follow their own rules and through collective action and pressure successfully pushed for **Emergency Restoration of utility service to medically vulnerable households**. The rules that offer protection for utility consumers clearly state the Division has the authority to order restoration of utility service in cases where health is at risk due to shut-off. We have successfully pressed for emergency restoration for medically vulnerable utility consumers whose utilities had been shut off.

-Successfully **defended existing utility protections to vulnerable households in RI Utility Termination Rules**. In 2013 drastic changes were proposed to "revise" the termination rules that would have significantly weakened or eliminated protections from utility termination, many of the protections that the George Wiley Center had fought for and won in the first place. We rallied and mobilized directly affected consumers whose protections would have been at risk (elderly, low-income, domestic abuse victims, people with limited access to computers, people who suffer in the extreme heat, etc.), as well as allied groups and others, and with collective pressure we **WON**. At the end of 2014, the PUC agreed to close their original proposed docket, thereby preserving the existing utility protections that were in place.

- Proposed and won **Emergency Regulations to allow affordable down payments for utility consumers to maintain or restore service**, rules in place from Nov to Dec, in recognition of the onset of winter and the need to make sure households have service turned back on before the cold season.

- **And more, with your participation and support.....!**

Continuing to work toward Utility Justice

Through the collective action of many over the years, the George Wiley Center has won dozens of victories in the fight for Utility Justice. However, we know **there is still a utility access crisis in Rhode Island when roughly 20,000 RI households are put through the stress and public health burden of having utility service terminated.** We find these numbers unacceptable and continue to push for longer term solutions.

We believe that RI utility and energy policy must include:

- A **Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP)** that would make utilities affordable for low-income Rhode Islanders
- **Public-centered policies** for utility and energy services
- **Increased public input** on issues of public utilities that affect us all
- Organizing so **people who are directly affected have a say** in decisions
- **Utility corporation transparency and accountability**
- **Stopping utility shut-offs on low-income households**
- **Utility systems that are affordable and sustainable** for people and planet
- **The right of all people to live in a home with utility service for water, light, heat, cooling, food, health, safety, and other basic needs**



Push for PIPP in Rhode Island!

(Percentage Income Payment Plan)



The George Wiley Center amping up our **Push for PIPP** (Percentage Income Payment Plan), as part of ongoing organizing for Utility Justice

Why support PIPP?

Recognizing utility service as a basic need and an essential element of adequate housing, PIPP programs help make sure all have access to affordable utility service. Under a PIPP, low-income households pay a fixed percentage of their income for utility bills based on the Federal Poverty Level of that household. Each year over 20,000 RI households are put through the trauma of utility termination due to unaffordable bills. Many go weeks or months without access to basic needs. A PIPP would make utility bills more affordable for low-income households and help stop the shut-off crisis in RI.

Has PIPP worked before?

Yes! Rhode Island was one of the first states in the country to implement a PIPP in the late 1980's. It lasted successfully for several years before being phased out due to cuts in federal LIHEAP funding. Currently, over a dozen states such as Ohio, New Jersey, and Maine have effective PIPP programs. In Illinois, for example, a PIPP lowered 90% of elderly customers' heating bills—more than any other utility assistance plan did.

What can I do to support PIPP?

Sign the petition (online at <https://tinyurl.com/pipprhodeisland>), share your story, spread the word! Educate others about PIPP, contact decision-makers, schedule a presentation. Please get in touch to be a part of this grassroots effort pushing toward Utility Justice, we welcome allies new and old!

Power of Organizing

Together we can have a bigger impact!

Attend weekly Utility Organizing Meeting

Every **Wednesday, 6:30pm**

George Wiley Center, 32 East Avenue, Pawtucket, RI 02860

(on the bus line, free on-street parking, wheelchair accessible, kid-friendly)

Are you behind on your utilities, facing shut off, or having difficulty with a payment plan that you can't afford? Do you want to learn about your rights and help stop the shut-off crisis in our state? Connect with the George Wiley Center to organize for more affordable service and broader Utility Justice. (You can also schedule a **"Know Your Utility Rights"** session for your group.)

Become a Member

The George Wiley Center organizes around the issues that affect you, your neighbors, your community and your state. As one of Rhode Island's longest running grassroots organizing groups, we have had many years of success in making public policy changes that help struggling households and create a more humane society. It is important to remember that the only way we can do this is with your involvement.



Building a just society requires strength in numbers. A strong membership is critical for us to win battles at the statehouse and with public agencies. Your membership is one way to affirm your connection to other members and to show that you are committed to direct action for social justice. Our power depends on members who are willing to step up and attend actions, attend meetings, make phone calls, advocate for each other, and be a visible reminder that social justice is crucial to a sustainable society.

Help us continue the fight to make Rhode Island a better home for us all!

Get Involved with the George Wiley Center

The George Wiley Center is a statewide group actively committed to local community organizing for the purpose of creating social and economic justice through changes in public policy. Interns and Volunteers welcome!

You can support the goals of the *George Wiley Center* and be part of pushing for social and economic justice by:

- Attending meetings
- Staying informed & informing others
- Doing consumer advocacy or lobbying
- Helping in the office, helping with outreach, providing rides
- Taking part in hearings and actions
- Volunteering a wide range of skills
- Connecting and spreading the word on social media

Interest Areas include:

- Affordable Utilities, Stopping shut-offs
- Renewable Energy for Low-Income Households
- Food & Anti-Hunger Advocacy
- Jobs & Living Wages
- Welfare Rights
- Other Issues of Economic Justice!

All ages and skill sets are welcome, you can make a difference!



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georgewileycenter.org

*Content based on George Wiley Center advocacy and organizing,
made possible by the support and participation of thousands across Rhode Island.*