



Peninsula Light Company's COVID Member Assistance Recovery Response

The most extreme collection measure Peninsula Light Company (PenLight) can take is to disconnect service. As a member-centered cooperative we make every effort to avoid disconnections. Prior to reaching this measure we offer payment plans and assistance programs. We work with State and local agencies along with non-profit and faith based organizations to assist members in need. We also provide a list to members in need of these organizations that have resources to assist with food, clothing and rent. As a member owned cooperative our members are our highest priority.

The normal annual budget for our financial assistance program, Project Help, is \$100,000. Additionally, members donate approximately \$43,000 per year through bill round-ups, recurring donations or one-time donations throughout the year. Our Board has made significant increases to aid members impacted by COVID and have added additional funds — more than tripling funding to date. Furthermore, a separate fund was set up to assist small businesses with their utility bill. The Board has not only increased the funding to Project Help but has allowed the program to remain open past the normal end date of April 30. PenLight applied significant modifications to Project Help in order to make it easier for members impacted by COVID to qualify including: increasing the bill credit amount, expanding the income guidelines, and making it possible to apply/qualify over the phone. More than half of those receiving assistance, this year, have never applied for aid in the past.

Despite our best efforts to contact members, our staff is concerned that some past due balances are continuing to grow. Every month that these members do not reply their balances increase, leaving us wondering: (1) how are they going to be able to pay these charges back; (2) how can we convince them to contact us without the fear of disconnection; and (3) how do we avoid disconnections? We have removed the disconnection warning on our disconnection notice, mailed letters to those that are past due, made or attempted personal calls to offer payment arrangements and financial assistance. In an additional effort, we have also delivered door tags offering financial assistance to past due members that we have not been able to reach. We have successfully assisted approximately 1,000 members with Project Help funds year to date.

We have allowed members to make payment arrangements and offer prepay as an option when a member is not able to pay their current bill, in addition to past charges, within an acceptable time frame. Our plan below explains changes we have made due to the COVID pandemic that allow our members to be more successful and get to a fully paid status as soon as possible without the fear of disconnection.

Prepay

This is a long term payment option. When members sign up for Prepay we require a payment of \$25 for a set-up charge and 10 days of consumption data in advance (calculated from personal usage). The prior past due balance is then rolled into debt recovery and 25% of every payment is applied towards this "debt." This allows the member as many months as they need to pay their past due. Members have the

option to make payments directly on the prior balance should they want to pay it off sooner. There are no late fees, disconnect or reconnect fees. Members have complete access to their daily usage and receive balance and payment notifications along with usage information. The member remains on Prepay until the debt is paid in full and no deposit is required when/if they return to Post Pay. For members impacted by COVID we will waive the \$25 set-up fee and assist them through Project Help with the first 10 days of service, not to exceed \$100.

Current Prepay Members

Previously existing prepay members, who are experiencing financial hardship, will have the option to move all or part of their past due balance to debt recovery to prevent any disruption of service. Prior to disconnection Prepay members are given a notification to allow them time to make a payment. Notifications are sent 7, 3, and 1 day prior with a final notification at 10 am the day of disconnection. These notifications are given to them based on what preference they have chosen when they signed up for Prepay (email, phone or text). Since March our staff has contacted each Prepay member with negative balances to offer financial assistance or left messages multiple times. For members impacted by COVID we will assist them through Project Help with 10 days of service (calculated from personal usage) not to exceed \$100.

Post-Pay

Payment Arrangements

This is a shorter term payment option. Payment arrangements for members impacted by COVID will be allowed for the same amount of time that it took to accrue the balance. Example; charges incurred March through August (6 months) would be paid with no interest or late fees divided into the next 6 months along with current charges, with agreement of the member. Late fees will be waived as long as the payment arrangement is preserved. If the arrangement is not followed, the member can remain in service by utilizing Prepay. Our staff feels the most important step is to assist the member to a fully paid state as soon as possible and not to continue to acquire more debt.

Disconnection of Service

Prior to disconnection, members will receive a disconnection notice. Notices are produced one week after the due date of the current bill. This notice allows 10 days following the original due date to contact our office. If no payment is made after the due date of the first notice, automated phone calls will be utilized two days prior to disconnect. We will make every effort to contact members prior to disconnection. Following all attempts, if the service is disconnected, the member is eligible for reconnection on Prepay in order to avoid a deposit and \$100 reconnect fee.

Other

PenLight has a strong and well respected social media presence. We utilize social media outlets along with our website, monthly newsletter and bill inserts to communicate with members. We feature weekly videos and other updates online informing members that financial assistance is available and how many families we have assisted to date. These same resources will be available to educate our membership when disconnection of services are set to begin along with announcements that assistance is available.