



March 2023

Dear Valued Customer:

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, most service providers have changed how they conduct business and deliver service to their customers. Despite nationwide changes and challenges, the City of Richmond Department of Public Utilities has maintained its position as a proud partner in helping protect the health and safety of Richmond residents by providing clean and safe drinking water, among other utility services. Due to federal funding made available through the CARES and American Rescue Plan Acts, DPU was able to distribute \$21.3 million of financial assistance to gas and water customers through calendar year 2022. Over the past year, DPU has taken progressive steps to normalize business operations and will continue on that path with the resumption of disconnections of utility services for non-payment in spring 2023.

### **Financial Assistance is Available**

Resuming disconnections is not an easy decision, nor is it taken lightly. DPU recognizes customers are still in need of financial assistance and are pleased to announce two new assistance programs – LIHWAP and PromisePay Payment Plans. These and other programs are outlined on the reverse side of this letter. All customers needing help paying their utility bill are strongly urged to review the available options and apply accordingly to avoid collection activity, up to and including disconnection of utility service.

### **Convenient and Flexible Payment Plans**

DPU has partnered with PromisePay to offer new flexible payment plans. Customers that are active on an existing payment plan with DPU are encouraged to convert to a new payment plan with PromisePay. Residential and commercial customers who are not currently enrolled in a payment plan with DPU, but are experiencing past due balances are also encouraged to enroll with PromisePay. Benefits include lower down payments, longer repayment terms, a variety of payment plan options, automatic payments, payment reminders and other account notifications all through the convenience of your mobile device.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

Customer focus, innovation and efficiency are part of DPU's strategic initiatives. The changes resulting from the pandemic have created both challenges and opportunities around these initiatives. Some of these changes have directly impacted service levels, as DPU has been hampered by backlogs created by the pandemic in addition to higher than usual staff vacancy rates. DPU is diligently working through backlogs to address customer issues in a timely manner and seamless fashion. Any customer with concerns about their bill is encouraged to contact us at (804) 646-4646 or via email at [dpucustserv@rva.gov](mailto:dpucustserv@rva.gov) for an account review. To avoid long hold times you may wish to call on days other than Mondays and Fridays, when call volumes are highest.

Longer-term solutions include enhanced hiring and retention practices as well as data-driven decisions that promote customer satisfaction. Current technologies, including the billing system, phone system and meter reading process have served us well over the years, but DPU is exploring newer technologies that will drive greater efficiencies into processes and enhance the overall customer experience. Stabilizing customer service levels is a high priority for DPU. Thank you for your patience and for allowing DPU the opportunity to make progress in these efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "April N. Bingham".

April N. Bingham, MPA  
Senior Director



## FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

DPU remains committed to providing safe and reliable utility service while creating exceptional value. If you have fallen behind on your utility payments, DPU is here to help! Full information and application details on all current programs can be found on our website at [www.rva.gov/public-utilities](http://www.rva.gov/public-utilities). If you need to speak with a live agent about any account services, don't delay, give us a call today at (804) 646-4646 for assistance.



- **PromisePay Payment Plans** – DPU recently partnered with PromisePay to bring flexible and convenient payment plans for customers who are behind on their utility bills. All customers with a past due balance may enroll in a PromisePay payment plan for their outstanding balance at [Richmond.promise-pay.com](http://Richmond.promise-pay.com). The PromisePay portal offers users the opportunity to select from a variety of payment plan options, set up automatic payments, and provide contact information for payment reminders and other account notifications through text messaging.
- **LIHWAP** – Qualified customers who are behind on their water bills are encouraged to apply to the federally-funded Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP). This temporary funding program is being administered through the Virginia Department of Social Services in partnership with PromisePay. Households eligible for LIHWAP assistance must have a past due water/wastewater balance and a gross household income below 150% of the federal poverty level based on household size. Eligible households must apply by visiting [www.virginialihwap.com](http://www.virginialihwap.com) or calling 888-373-9908. **Customers are encouraged to apply as soon as possible as LIHWAP funding will end once funds are depleted.**
- **MetroCare Water Program** – This water bill payment assistance program provides funds to eligible families and individuals who are having difficulty paying their primary water bills due to financial concerns. There is an application process and ratepayers can receive up to \$500 per applicant if approved.
- **MetroCare Heat Program** – This heating bill payment assistance program provides funds to eligible families and individuals who are having trouble paying their primary heating bills due to a financial difficulty or other special hardship. The program period begins December 15. Residents within Richmond Gas Works' service territory may apply for funds through MetroCare.
- **MetroCare Water Conservation Program** – This program provides financial assistance to eligible customers who are homeowners for plumbing repairs and the replacement of water-inefficient appliances with EPA WaterSense products to conserve water and reduce wasteful consumption. This program includes an audit approved by the Department of Energy for all eligible homeowners as a method for improving water use efficiency.
- **SeniorCare Program** – This program caters to the unique needs of seniors 65 years of age and older in the Richmond metropolitan community. Senior customers can sign up for this program and take advantage of Winter Service Assurance, no late fees, security deposit waiver program, annual weatherization kit giveaways and third party notification.
- **Equal Monthly Payment Plan** – The EMPP budget plan spreads your annual gas bill over 12 months. The estimated monthly payment is based on the previous year's natural gas usage.