



## Policy Brief:

# Public utility consumer rights and regulation

Public Utility Law Project of New York, Inc.

**This poster will help low-income consumers understand the rights they have when dealing with public utility companies.**

## About the advocate

The Public Utility Law Project's (PULP) mission is to advocate, educate, and litigate on behalf of New York State's low-, moderate-, and fixed-income ratepayers. They work on writing and advocating for legislation like the 1981 Home Energy Fair Practices Act, that protects the rights of low-income New York utility consumers. PULP trains advocates, lawyers, and consumers about utility rights.

## The issue

The final termination notice, the bill that quadruples, the summons to court to meet with Con Ed – in all of these situations, low-income people have rights. NYC has the second most expensive electricity costs in the country. The inability of low-income people to afford their utilities forces them to choose between paying their utility bills and basic necessities like rent, food, medication, and school supplies. These costs can be the final straw that sends a family directly into homelessness. Public utility companies are required to follow consumer protection laws, but often don't. Consumers are often unaware of the rights these regulations give them to keep their essential electric, gas, and telephone service.



# MAKING POLICY PUBLIC

## **The impact**

The publication will describe the Home Energy Fair Practices Act and its many protections. It will describe consumers' basic rights and the process by which they can assert them. The poster will inform utility consumers of their legal rights, and attempt to reduce the extraordinary stress low-income people feel when faced with overwhelming utility bills.

## **The distribution network**

The guide will be distributed to PULP clients and those who call the PULP hotline. It will also be distributed to other advocates in the field, legal services organizations, housing rights advocates, and elected officials. PULP plans to present the guide at community meetings, health fairs, community board events, and senior centers.



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