

38.5.1411 MEDICAL EXCEPTIONS (1) Except as provided herein, service may not be terminated to a residence where a licensed health care professional certifies to the utility that the absence of service will aggravate an existing medical condition which would threaten the health of any permanent resident. A licensed health care professional means a licensed physician, physician assistant-certified, advanced practice registered nurse, or registered nurse provided for in ARM 37.106.2805 and Title 37, MCA. All certifications must be in writing and provide the name and address of the person with the medical condition that would be aggravated by a termination of service. The certification must include the printed name, signature, office address and telephone number of the certifying licensed health care professional. A medical condition certificate is valid for 180 days from the date it is signed and dated by the licensed health care professional, and may be renewed on a semiannual basis.

(2) To avoid the accumulation of a substantial arrearage during the term of the medical certificate, the utility and the customer, or an authorized representative of the customer, shall negotiate an equitable payment arrangement that is reasonable and consistent with the customer's ability to pay. If the customer fails to make payments as established, resulting in an arrearage of \$500 or more, the customer is required to enter into and comply with a monthly payment arrangement equal to the average of the last 12 months billing plus 1/12 of the arrearage. Failure to enter into a monthly payment arrangement and make payments will result in disconnection proceedings being initiated as set out in (3).

(3) The utility must provide written notice of the initiation of disconnection proceedings to the customer. If the missed payments are not received within ten days of mailing, the utility must send a second notice. From the date of the second notice the customer must pay at least one-third of the delinquent charges to avoid termination of service. The second notice must be sent by the utility at least ten days prior to the date of the proposed termination. All written notices must be sent by first class or certified mail. Prior to termination of service the utility must make a diligent attempt to contact the customer, either in person or by telephone, to apprise the customer of the proposed action. If telephone or personal contact is not made, the utility employee shall leave notice in a place conspicuous to the customer that service will be terminated on the next business day. If the required payment is made, a new payment arrangement will be recalculated consistent with (2). Under no circumstances shall disconnection proceedings occur on accounts with an arrearage of less than \$500. Nothing in this rule prevents a utility from continuing service to a delinquent medically protected account.

(4) The utility must notify the commission in writing of the proposed termination at the beginning of the disconnection process. The commission may intervene and require a different payment arrangement or delay termination of services if the circumstances warrant. Before the commission will consider approving an alternate payment arrangement, the customer must apply, if eligible, for financial aid through organizations providing utility bill payment assistance and must respond to commission requests for information. The payment arrangement set by the commission is binding upon both the customer and the utility. Failure to comply with the payment arrangement may result in disconnection proceedings being initiated as set out in (3).

(5) From November 1 through March 31, the utility may not terminate a medical exception account protected from disconnection by the criteria established in ARM 38.5.1410.