

DEPARTMENT POLICY

State Emergency Relief (SER) helps to restore or prevent shut off of a utility service specified in this item when service is necessary to prevent serious harm to SER group members.

Covered Services

The following are covered utility services:

- Payment of an arrearage to maintain or restore service for the following utilities: water, sewer or cooking gas. The payment must restore or continue service for at least 30 days at the current residence. However, payments for current charges are not allowed.
- A deposit (including membership fees and lease/rental payments for an on-site storage tank) required by the utility provider to begin, maintain, or restore one of the following services currently or previously the responsibility of the SER group: water, sewer and cooking fuel.
- Fees for connection, reconnection, or hookup of utility services.

The bill does not have to be in the client's name but it must be connected to the group's current address. If the bill, including old or transferred balances, must be paid to start or maintain service at the current or new address, payment may be authorized up to the fiscal year cap as long as the payment resolves the emergency.

Payment Maximums for Non-Energy Utility Services

Service	Payment Maximum
Water/Sewer	\$350 per Fiscal Year
Cooking Gas	\$175 per Fiscal Year
Reconnect Fee/Deposit	\$200 Each Issuance

Services Not Covered

Do not approve the following services under any circumstances:

- Telephone arrearages, installation costs or deposits.
- Unauthorized or illegal usage of any utility.
- Bankrupt accounts.
- Utility service that does not reflect the SER group's actual usage. An example of this is common service, when one meter serves more than one residence. If the local utility can verify the SER group's actual usage in these situations and the utility will accept payment for the SER group's portion and maintain service, common meter service is no longer a barrier to eligibility.
- Back rent when the client has a judgement which includes money owed on a utility bill. This is considered a relocation service, not a utility service.

Example: A client has requested payment for eviction which includes money owed on a utility bill. The landlord has paid the bill up-to-date with the provider, but the client has not paid the landlord for the utility, which is part of the rental agreement. The utility payment would be included as part of the total amount needed to prevent eviction.

- Payments to residential landlords, residential management companies, billing service agencies, or collection agencies are not eligible to receive emergency service (ES) or SER funds, as they are not the actual service provider. Examples of third party billing companies are who are not eligible service providers include:
 - Universal Utilities.
 - D & B Billing Services.
 - Electrical Inspection Company.

Required Payments**COOKING GAS**

The SER group has to pay the minimum monthly amounts for cooking gas for the last six months. See the Monthly Required

Payment chart below. The required payment period is always the six-month period prior to the month the SER group applies. The Paid Amount field is the amount that was actually paid for the 6 months prior to the SER application. If required payments of the requested service were not met, determine if good cause for non-payment exists. Unmet required payments are also referred to as a shortfall. See ERM 204, Client Caused Emergencies and ERM 103, Application Procedures.

SER cannot be used to make required payments.

Shortfall payments cannot be waived.

Use the DHS-1419, Decision Notice, each time a utility services payment is approved, acknowledging that the utility required payment must be met before utility services are again authorized.

WATER/SEWER

The required payment amount for water/sewer is \$0, therefore Good Cause is granted for each water/sewer service request. A SER group is not required to make payments in the 6 months prior to the SER application for these service requests in order to be eligible for energy assistance.

The SER Required Payments - Details screen should be completed as follows for any of the 6 months prior to the SER application month:

The dropdown value next to the applicable SER service type(s) should contain a "No" response to the question, "Did the client have an obligation to pay for this month?" Authorizations

Before authorizing the department's portion of the cost of services, verify that the income, shortfall, non-citizen proration, and contribution have been paid by the client or will be paid by another agency. Approve payment up to the fiscal year cap if it will resolve the emergency and if the provider will maintain or restore service for at least 30 days. Do not authorize any payment that will not resolve the current emergency, even if the payment is within the fiscal year cap.

Payments are applied to the cap of the client. Client means the applicant for or recipient of SER and includes all group members. Every individual in the group who benefits from the payment, including minor children, will have payments applied to their individual cap. The payments made to cap follow the individual even if they move from one household to another.

Example: An SER payment is made for water on the mother's case. The payment applies to the mother's cap and to all the children who live with her. One child leaves the home and moves in with the father. The father then applies for SER for water. The child's cap is applied to the father's eligibility determination because the child has benefited from a water payment.

Bridges tracks all service authorizations and cap limits for each individual. In order to view the payment caps, complete an inquiry in Bridges for each SER group member. Caps can be viewed in *Benefit Issuance/SER Adjustments/View SER Cap*.

Cooking Gas Required Payments	
Group Size	Monthly Required Payments
1	\$8
2	\$9
3	\$10
4	\$11
5	\$13
6 or more	\$15

Verification

Verify actual or possible shutoff of water, sewer or cooking gas service by:

- A disconnect notice from the utility.
- Information from the utility provider's secure website.
- An overdue or delinquency notice when the water or sewer is not disconnected but the arrearage is added to the local tax bill.
- The client's statement of need for cooking fuel.
- Collateral contact with provider- must contain the following information:
 - Date.
 - Client name and case number.

- Verification of Emergency- account in shut-off status, service disconnected or arrearage will be added to tax bill.
- Amount needed to resolve the emergency.
- Name on account.
- Any other pertinent account information.
- The name of the person at the utility company who provided the information along with the signature of the MDHHS staff person obtaining the information (signature needed when completing the DHS-223).

Verify that the SER group has made required payments by:

- A statement from the provider.
- Utility payment receipts.
- Fax/email/phone call from the provider.
- Information from provider's secure website.

LEGAL BASE

MAC R400.7001 et seq.