

Tri-County Utility Bill Assistance Guide

Berkeley, Charleston, and Dorchester Counties - electric, gas, water, sewer, and emergency bill support

Fast coordination note: This guide does not guarantee funds. Utility assistance changes daily. Call before sending anyone in person, ask what is open today, ask which utility providers they can pay, and ask who else is paying bills this week if they are out of funds.

Start here first

1. Trident United Way / 211 / Centers for Strong Families

Best for: first-call referrals, family coaching, utility-support pathways, and partner navigation across the tri-county area.

Contact: Dial 211. TUV main: 843-740-9000. Berkeley CSF: 843-761-6033. Dorchester/Summerville CSF: 843-566-7040.

Coverage: Berkeley, Charleston, Dorchester. Berkeley Center: 500 S Live Oak Dr, Moncks Corner. Dorchester Center: 133 E 1st North St, Suite 3, Summerville.

Funding reality: Often a referral/coordination hub rather than a direct payer, but usually the widest resource network.

Review/reputation check: Strong credibility signal: Charity Navigator lists Trident United Way as 4-star / 95%. TUV pages list utility-support referrals and Centers for Strong Families.

2. Palmetto Community Action Partnership - LIHEAP, EnergyShare, GEAP, Good Neighbor

Best for: primary energy/utility assistance for low-income households. This is the main LIHEAP route for the three counties.

Contact: Utility appointment hotline: 1-844-769-6448. Charleston office: 843-724-6760. Charleston Water Good Neighbor info also lists Palmetto CAP: 843-723-9285.

Coverage: Berkeley, Charleston, Dorchester. Main office: 1069 King St, Charleston.

Funding reality: Appointments are limited and first-come, first-served. Palmetto CAP states energy-bill appointments are released Friday at 8 a.m. Names/address/documents must match.

Review/reputation check: Official Community Action agency for BCD counties. Public program role is strong; staff-review sites show mixed internal organization signals, so call early and document everything.

3. Utility company hardship programs and payment arrangements

Best for: same-day protection when there is a shutoff notice, high bill, or immediate disconnect risk.

Contact: Dominion SC: 800-251-7234. Santee Cooper: 800-804-7424. Berkeley Electric: local district office or SmartHub. Charleston Water: 843-727-6800. Berkeley County Water/Sanitation: 843-572-4400.

Coverage: Depends on provider and service address.

Funding reality: Ask for payment arrangement, extension, medical needs flag, third-party notice, hardship options, budget billing, and agency pledge delay.

Review/reputation check: Official provider options are often the fastest way to buy time while assistance is pending.

Nonprofits and smaller local programs

Neighbors Together

Best for: limited rent and utility help for neighbors facing temporary setbacks.

Contact: 843-747-1788

Coverage: North Charleston / Lowcountry, by appointment. Applications reviewed Mon, Tue, Thu 10-1.

Funding reality: Case-by-case, by appointment only.

Review/reputation check: Charity Navigator lists 3-star; longstanding local 501(c)(3).

The Salvation Army

Best for: utility assistance when local funds are open.

Contact: 843-761-8626

Coverage: Multiple locations / service units. Ask which office covers the client ZIP.

Funding reality: Funds vary by location and day.

Review/reputation check: Nationally known provider; local availability changes.

East Cooper Community Outreach (ECCO)

Best for: mortgage, rent, or utility help for East Cooper households.

Contact: 843-849-9220

Coverage: East Cooper / Mount Pleasant area.

Funding reality: Must be or become an ECCO client. Opens the 1st of each month and closes when monthly allocation is reached. Usually once per 24 months.

Review/reputation check: Charity Navigator lists ECCO as 4-star; strong local reputation.

Our Lady of Mercy Community Outreach

Best for: basic/emergency assistance and possible financial help.

Contact: 843-805-8064

Coverage: Johns Island, Sea Islands, downtown Charleston / Neighborhood House routes.

Funding reality: Call first for service area and appointment process.

Review/reputation check: Longstanding local nonprofit; TUV partnership page confirms emergency and financial assistance.

James Island Outreach

Best for: utility disconnection risk for qualifying local clients.

Contact: 843-762-3653

Coverage: James Island 29412 and Folly Beach 29439 only.

Funding reality: Can assist clients at risk of disconnection from Charleston Water, James Island PSD, or Dominion. Applications Tue/Thu 9:30-11:30 or by appointment.

Review/reputation check: Local church/community coalition; official site confirms financial assistance.

St. Vincent de Paul - St. John the Beloved, Summerville

Best for: person-to-person help that may include direct dollar or in-kind assistance.

Contact: 843-607-9157

Coverage: Summerville / parish conference area.

Funding reality: Small volunteer charity. Leave clear voicemail and include shutoff date/provider.

Review/reputation check: Small local charity model; assistance is confidential and individualized.

Catholic Charities of South Carolina - Coastal Office

Best for: emergency assistance/referral through Catholic Charities or parish partners.

Contact: 843-531-5570 or 843-808-3797

Coverage: Findhelp lists Berkeley, Charleston, and Dorchester service.

Funding reality: Call to confirm whether utility funds are open and whether they refer through parish partners.

Review/reputation check: Diocese-backed nonprofit; public sources list emergency assistance in Charleston Deanery.

Origin SC

Best for: housing stability counseling and referrals; direct utility assistance may be paused.

Contact: 843-628-2301 or 843-628-3000

Coverage: Tri-county, depending on program.

Funding reality: Origin SC says new rent and utility applications were paused effective Nov. 18, 2025 due to high volume. Verify before sending.

Review/reputation check: Good organization, but not a first direct-fund call while paused.

Help of Summerville

Best for: local resource connection and referral.

Contact: Through TUW Dorchester CSF: 843-566-7040

Coverage: Summerville area.

Funding reality: Their site directs people needing assistance to Resource Connection.

Review/reputation check: Good connector, not confirmed as a direct utility-payment funder.

Utility-specific routes

Provider/program	What to ask for	Contact
Dominion Energy SC	EnergyShare, payment plan, third-party notice, medical needs flag, budget billing, and hardship options. EnergyShare may provide up to \$1,000 through local Community Action agencies for eligible customers.	800-251-7234; EnergyShare through Palmetto CAP/local Community Action.
Santee Cooper Community Cares	Community Cares and payment arrangements. Santee Cooper says customers request Community Cares through SC211 and funds vary.	800-804-7424; request Community Cares through SC211.
Berkeley Electric Cooperative	Payment arrangement before cutoff. Site says members can extend bills up to 7 days past cutoff through district office or SmartHub.	Local district office or SmartHub.
Charleston Water System	Payment plan, 10-day extension, Good Neighbor Program, and whether the account must be in disconnect status.	843-727-6800; Good Neighbor via Palmetto CAP.
Berkeley County Water and Sanitation	Billing/customer service assistance, portal options, current arrangement policy.	843-572-4400.
LIHWAP water assistance	Check whether water assistance is active/open locally. State requirements include SC residence at service address, bill in household member name, eligible immigration status, and income limits.	SC Office of Economic Opportunity / local Community Action.

Documents to gather before calling

- Utility bill with account number, service address, past-due amount, and shutoff/disconnect date.
- Photo ID for applicant, ideally showing current address if available.
- Social Security cards or numbers for household members if applying through LIHEAP/Community Action.
- Proof of household income for the last 30 days or benefit award letters.
- Proof of emergency/hardship when applying for general emergency assistance.
- Lease or proof of residence if the bill/service address does not clearly match the client address.

Phone scripts

For agencies: "I am helping someone in [county/ZIP] with a utility bill. Provider is [name]. They owe [\$] and shutoff date is [date]. Are utility funds open today? If not, who is paying utility bills this week?"

For utilities: "I am calling before disconnect to ask about a payment arrangement, hardship hold, medical flag, third-party notice, EnergyShare/Community Cares referral, or any way to keep service active while assistance is pending."

Quick triage order

Situation	Best first steps
Disconnect today/tomorrow	Call utility first for hold/extension, then Palmetto CAP, then TUW/211, then Salvation Army/Neighbors Together/small local agency by ZIP.
Dominion bill	Dominion payment options + Palmetto CAP LIHEAP/EnergyShare + 211.

Situation	Best first steps
Santee Cooper	Santee Cooper payment arrangement + SC211/Community Cares + TUW.
Berkeley Electric	Berkeley Electric arrangement + Palmetto CAP LIHEAP + Berkeley CSF.
Charleston Water	Charleston Water plan/10-day extension + Good Neighbor via Palmetto CAP.
James Island/Folly	James Island Outreach if existing/eligible client and at risk of disconnection.
East Cooper/Mt Pleasant	ECCO, especially near the 1st of the month.

Notes for Red Bird coordinators

- Do not promise funds. Say “possible utility assistance” and verify what is open today.
- Ask whether the agency pays electric only, water only, gas only, or multiple utility types.
- If funds are out, ask who else is paying bills this week before ending the call.
- Ask if they can pledge directly to the utility; some providers delay shutoff when a pledge is pending.
- Mention disability, elderly household members, children, medical equipment, oxygen, or mobility limitations during utility calls.

Source and review notes

Source area	What was checked
Trident United Way	TUW pages list utility-support referrals and CSF contacts. Charity Navigator lists 4-star / 95%.
Palmetto CAP	Official LIHEAP/outreach pages list BCD utility assistance and Friday 8 a.m. appointment release; SC OEO lists agency.
Dominion EnergyShare	Dominion says SC customers may apply for up to \$1,000 through local Community Action agencies, eligibility/funds vary.
Santee Cooper	Community Cares requested via SC211; assistance varies by funds.
Neighbors Together	Official site lists rent/utility assistance by appointment; Charity Navigator lists 3-star.
ECCO	Official page lists utility help, client requirement, once every 24 months; Charity Navigator lists 4-star.
Our Lady of Mercy	Official/partner pages list emergency/financial assistance and contacts.
James Island Outreach	Official pages list emergency financial assistance for utility disconnection risk and contact 843-762-3653.
Provider pages	Charleston Water, Berkeley Electric, BCWS, Dominion, Santee Cooper pages checked for payment assistance/arrangements.
Public directories	CCPL, Dorchester County resources, and Findhelp-style directory entries cross-checked for local assistance routes.

Compiled from official program pages, county/public resource directories, utility assistance pages, Charity Navigator, and public review/reputation signals available online. This was not confirmed by phone on the date of printing.