

Mother:
Does my clinical depression qualify as a serious illness?

2

Doctor:
Yes. I will call the phone company and tell them you are applying for a serious illness protection. Based on my call, the phone company should turn your service back on for 7 days. I will then fill out a written certification document.

3

Mother:
What happens after you submit the written form?

Doctor:
If the company accepts the form, your phone service will be protected for a maximum of 30 days. We can renew this protection two more times, equaling a **maximum of 90 days**. Also, what you described earlier counts as a **personal emergency**. You could write a letter to the phone company explaining the situation and why you cannot pay your bill – you might receive an **additional 30 days** of protected service.

Mother:
I am worried about sharing my experience with domestic abuse. What if my ex finds out I told someone?

4

Mother:
That is 120 days of protected phone service -- by then it should be easier to pay overdue bills. But what if the phone company rejects the form you submit?

5

Doctor:
The Massachusetts Department of Telecommunications and Cable (DTC) encourages providers like me to bring any rejected doctor's letters to their attention at 1-800-392-6066

Doctor:
One more thing - your domestic violence advocate may help you apply for the free or low cost cell phone program (Lifeline) as part of your safety planning.

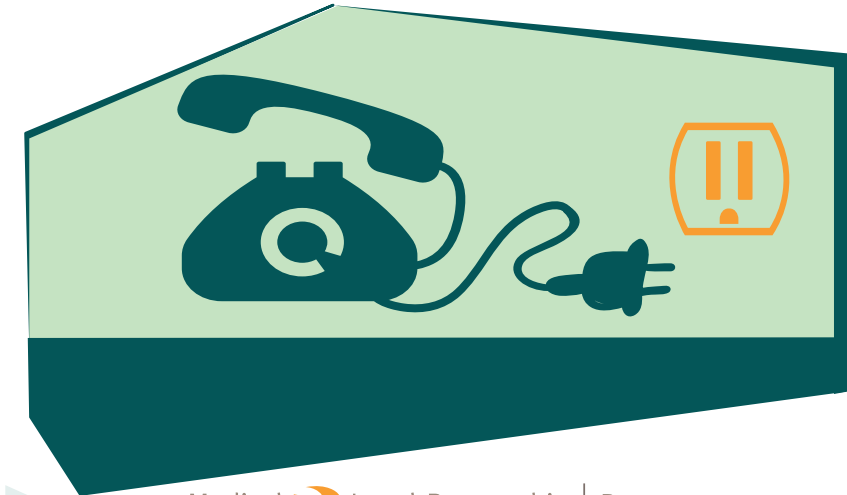
6

Mother:
I will call her when my land line is turned back on!

Staying Connected: Know Your Rights to Telephone Service



An It Takes Two Guide for
Patients and Providers



Medical  Legal Partnership | Boston
RAISING THE BAR FOR HEALTH

Acknowledgments:

This resource was made possible through support from the **J.E. & Z.B. Butler Foundation**. We are grateful to the **National Consumer Law Center** for its contributions to the content.

Designed by **Artists for Humanity**.

Information contained in this document is for educational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice or establish an attorney-client relationship. One should contact a lawyer or advocate with specific questions.

July 2016

Pathways to Land Line Telephone Shut-off Protection* and Related Affordability

1



Mother:
I finally kicked out my boyfriend. He threatened me in front of my son, and that was the final straw. But it is hard to pay bills without him, so the phone company shut off my telephone last week. Can you help me?

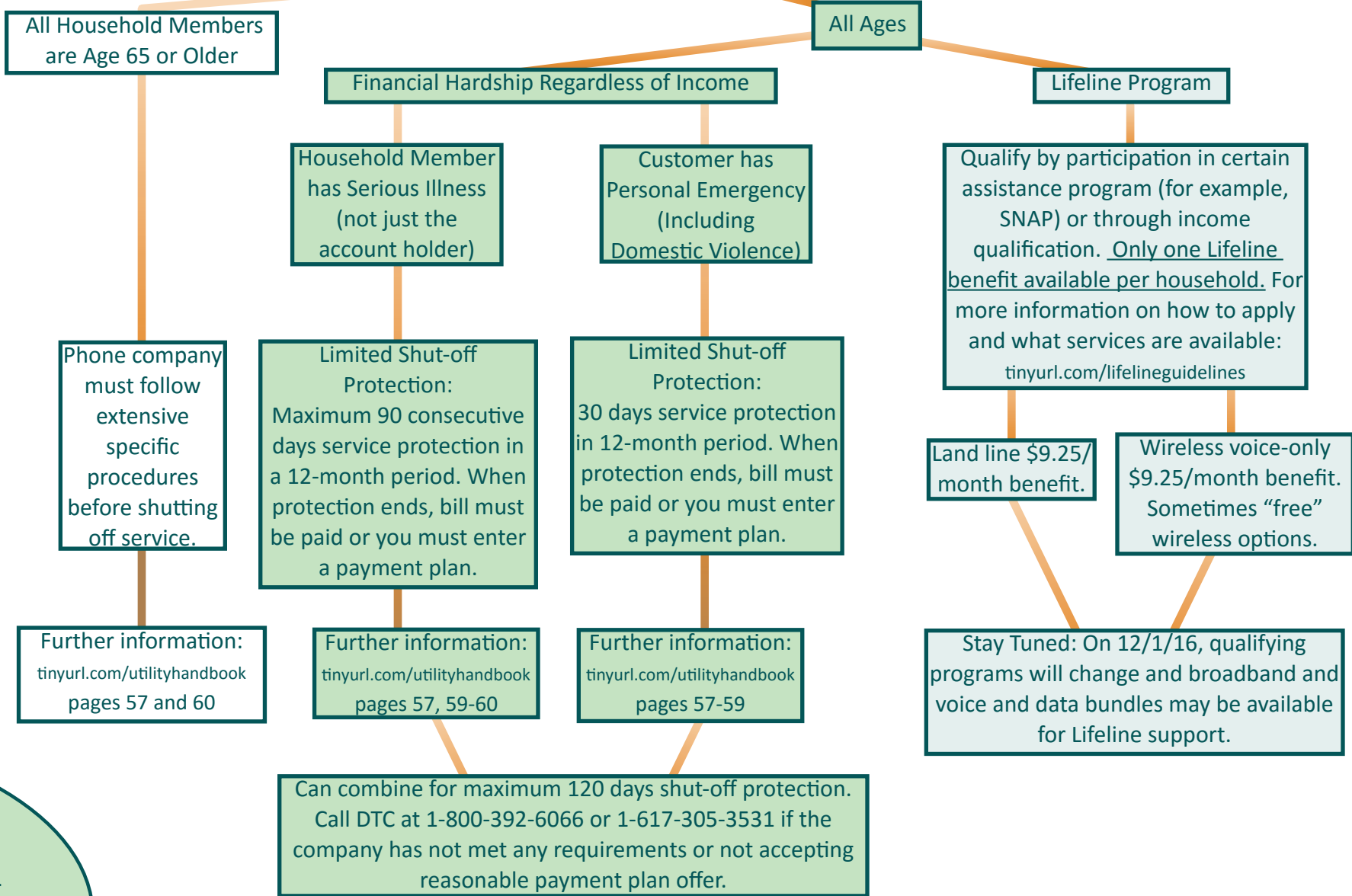
Doctor:
Do you have support from an advocate trained to help in these situations?



Mother:
I have a domestic violence advocate and I keep a hotline number with me at all times. But I cannot make calls without a phone!



Doctor:
When a customer has a financial hardship and cannot pay their land line bill, phone companies may be required to negotiate payment plans with them. While you are working out a payment plan, there may be some short-term protections available to you due to "personal emergency." Here is a chart of those protections:



* These shut-off protections apply to certain land line services (not cell/mobile phones), including service over copper wires or some services delivered over fiber lines. Contact the Massachusetts Department of Telecommunications and Cable (DTC) or your phone company to find out if these rules apply to your phone service.