WEST VIRGINIA CODE: §8-19-12A

§8-19-12a. Deposit required for new customers; lien for delinquent service rates and charges; failure to cure delinquency; payment from deposit; reconnecting deposit; return of deposit; liens; civil actions; deferral of filing fees and costs in magistrate court action; limitations with respect to foreclosure.

(a)(1) Whenever any rates and charges for water services or facilities furnished remain unpaid for a period of twenty days after the same become due and payable, the property and the owner thereof, as well as the user of the services and facilities provided, shall be delinquent and the owner, user and property shall be held liable at law until such time as all such rates and charges are fully paid. When a payment has become delinquent, the municipality may utilize any funds held as a security deposit to satisfy the delinquent payment. All new applicants for service shall indicate to the municipality or governing body whether they are an owner or tenant with respect to the service location.

(2) The municipality or governing body, but only one of them, may collect from all new applicants for service a deposit of $50 or two twelfths of the average annual usage of the applicant's specific customer class, whichever is greater, to secure the payment of water service rates, fees and charges in the event they become delinquent as provided in this section. In any case where a deposit is forfeited to pay service rates, fees and charges which were delinquent and the user's service is disconnected or terminated, no reconnection or reinstatement of service may be made by the municipality or governing body until another deposit equal to $50 or a sum equal to two twelfths of the average usage for the applicant's specific customer class, whichever is greater, is remitted to the municipality or governing body. After twelve months of prompt payment history, the municipality or governing body shall return the deposit to the customer or credit the customer's account with interest at a rate as the Public Service Commission may prescribe: Provided, That where the customer is a tenant, the municipality or governing body is not required to return the deposit until the time the tenant discontinues service with the municipality or governing body. Whenever any rates, fees, rentals or charges for services or facilities furnished remain unpaid for a period of twenty days after the same become due and payable, the user of the services and facilities provided is delinquent and the user is liable at law until all rates, fees and charges are fully paid. The municipality or governing body may, under reasonable rules promulgated by the Public Service Commission, shut off and discontinue water services to a delinquent user of water facilities ten days after the water services become delinquent regardless of whether the municipality or governing body utilizes the security deposit to satisfy any delinquent payments: Provided further, That nothing contained within the rules of the Public Service Commission shall be deemed to require any agents or employees of the municipality or governing body to accept payment at the customer's premises in lieu of discontinuing service for a delinquent bill.

(b) All rates or charges for water service whenever delinquent shall be liens of equal dignity,

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rank and priority with the lien on such premises of state, county, school and municipal taxes for the amount thereof upon the real property served, and the municipality shall have plenary power and authority from time to time to enforce such lien in a civil action to recover the money due for such services rendered plus court fees and costs and a reasonable attorney's fee: Provided, That an owner of real property may not be held liable for the delinquent rates or charges for services or facilities of a tenant, nor shall any lien attach to real property for the reason of delinquent rates or charges for services or facilities of a tenant of such real property, unless the owner has contracted directly with the municipality to purchase such services or facilities.

(c) Municipalities are hereby granted a deferral of filing fees or other fees and costs incidental to the bringing and maintenance of an action in magistrate court for the collection of the delinquent rates and charges. If the municipality collects the delinquent account, plus fees and costs, from its customer or other responsible party, the municipality shall pay to the magistrate court the filing fees or other fees and costs which were previously deferred.

(d) No municipality may foreclose upon the premises served by it for delinquent rates or charges for which a lien is authorized by this section except through the bringing and maintenance of a civil action for such purpose brought in the circuit court of the county wherein the municipality lies. In every such action, the court shall be required to make a finding based upon the evidence and facts presented that the municipality had exhausted all other remedies for the collection of debts with respect to such delinquencies prior to the bringing of such action. In no event shall foreclosure procedures be instituted by any municipality or on its behalf unless such delinquency had been in existence or continued for a period of two years from the date of the first such delinquency for which foreclosure is being sought.

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