



## Risks of Utility Shutoffs Are Rising in Massachusetts

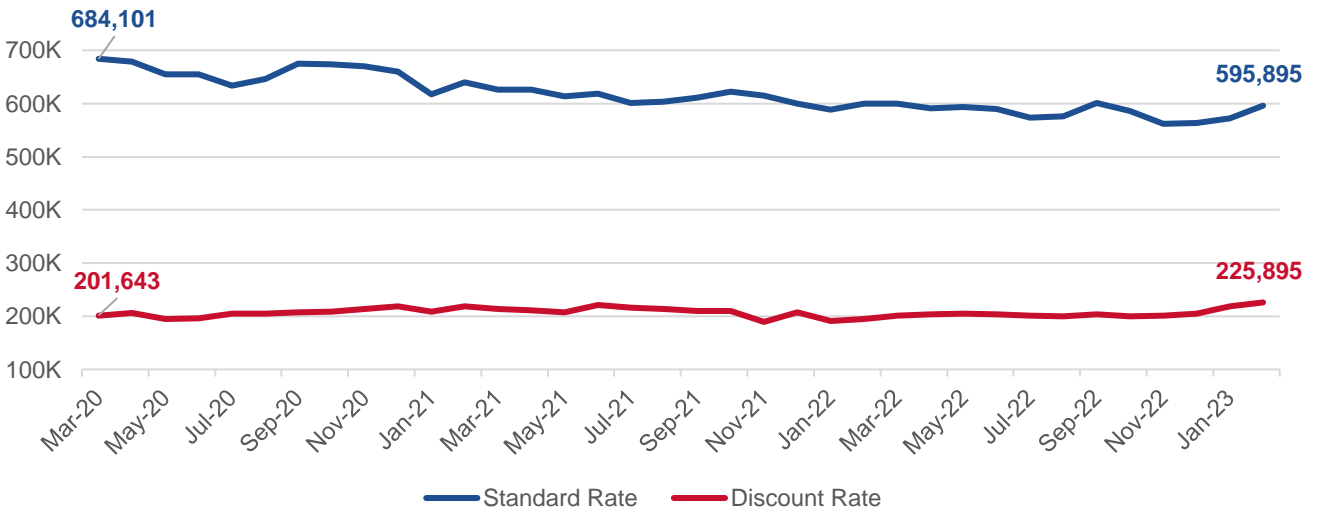
April 2023

The National Consumer Law Center has compiled Massachusetts gas and electric arrearage data collected in DPU docket 20-58 through February 2023. Here we provide a brief update to previous reports released in [February 2021](#), [November 2021](#), and [November 2022](#) on the state of arrears in MA. As of April 1, the winter moratorium that protects discount rate residential customers from disconnection has expired, leaving over 800,000 residential households, particularly the more than 400,000 customers more than 90 days behind, at risk for termination. While data presented here is only through February 2023, we can assume that arrears have continued to grow since then. Based on past trends, we fear that we will see a higher level of arrears this year than at any point during the pandemic.

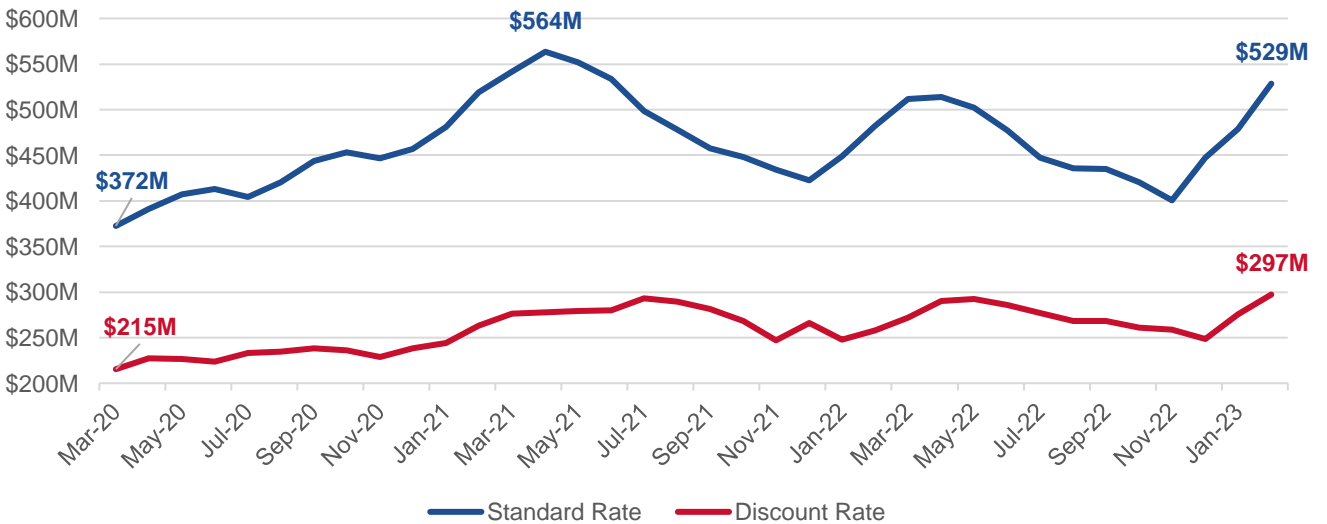
When looking at this summary, keep in mind that unpaid balances represent a customer's inability to pay their bills. Additionally, data from jurisdictions where terminations can be analyzed by race show that customers of color, particularly Black customers, experience energy insecurity at higher rates than white customers i.e. more frequent loss of service or threat of termination. This disparate impact has been explored more extensively in our previous reports cited above, but, here it can be assumed that Massachusetts communities of color are also disproportionately shouldering the burden of credit and collections policies and increased arrears.

- Overall, there were nearly 822,000 **residential accounts** – standard rate and discount rate combined – at least 30 days behind on their gas and electric bills in February 2023. These customers owed a total of \$826 million, which is \$44 million more than was owed in February 2021 during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and \$85 million more owed than in February 2022. Compared to the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, residential customers owe about \$238 million (40%) more in February 2023.
  - The number of **discount rate customers** in arrears is at a record high, up 10% from the start of COVID in March 2020. These customers owed \$297 million (a 38% increase);
  - **Standard rate customers** owed \$529 million (a 42% increase from beginning of pandemic). On average these customers owed \$887, which is up 63% from the start of COVID and near record level.
- Over 420,000 **residential customers** were more than 90 days behind on their electric and/or gas bill at the end of February 2023. While this number overall appears to have an encouraging trend downward, the customer that are severely behind continue to fall more behind. These customers owed over \$557 million, a 41% increase from the beginning of the pandemic. Additionally, due to high winter energy bills it can be assumed that arrears will age, placing even more households at high risk of termination, since the winter moratorium expired on April 1.
  - 69% of **discount rate customers** in arrears were more than 90 days behind as of February 2023, owing \$224 million (\$1,444 each on average);
  - 45% of **standard rate customers** in arrears were more than 90 days behind as of February 2023, owing \$334 million (\$1,258 on average).

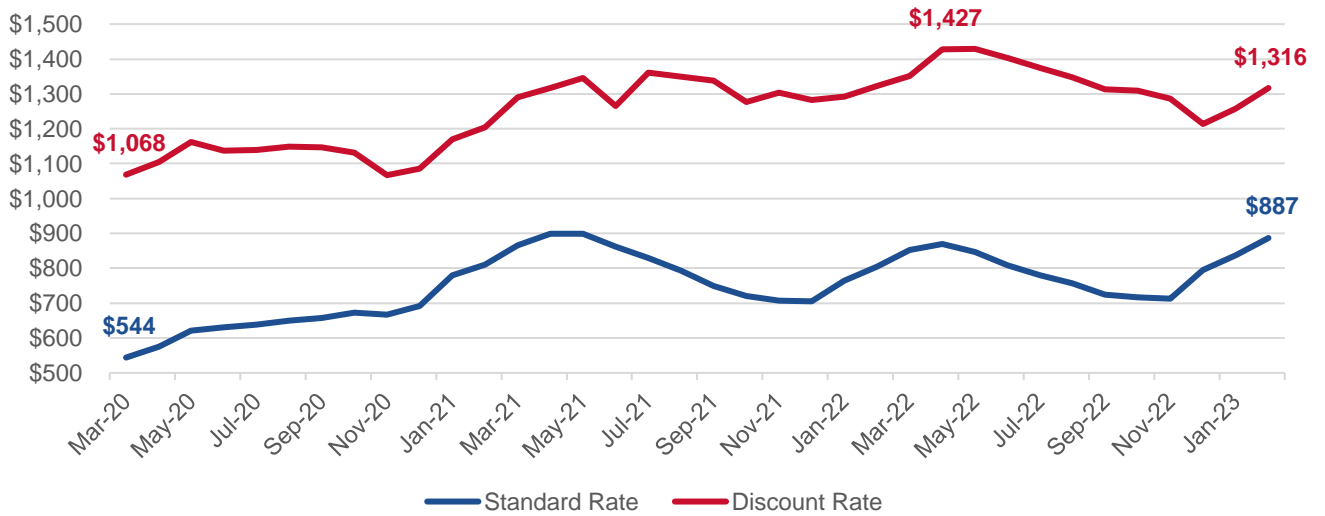
**Chart 1: Number of Standard Rate and Discount Rate Residential Customers in Arrears, March 2020 – February 2023**



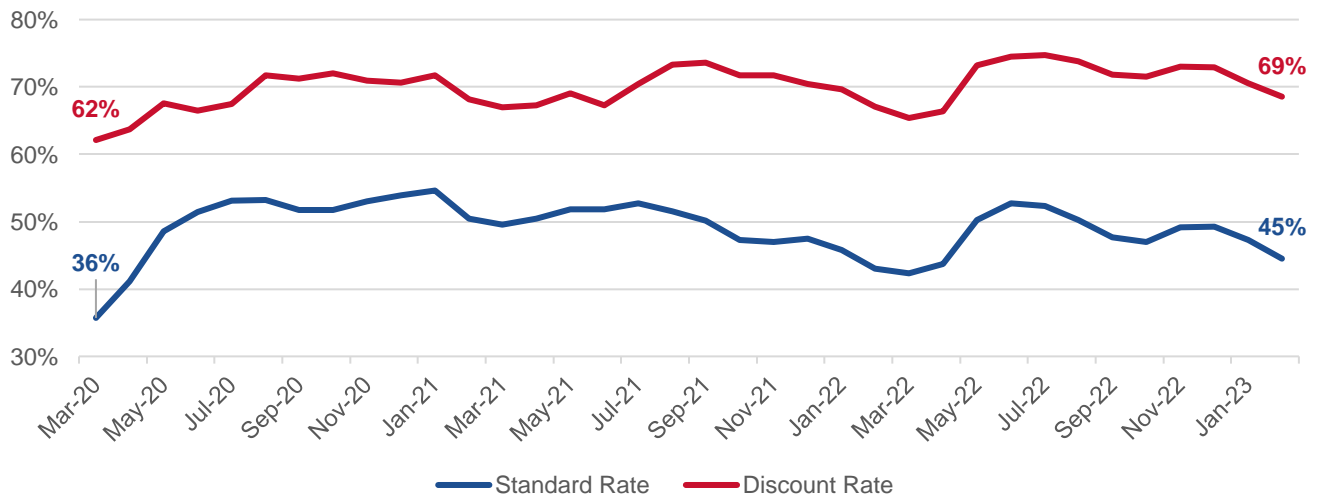
**Chart 2: Total Dollar Value of Arrears Owed by Discount and Standard Rate Customers, March 2020 – February 2023**



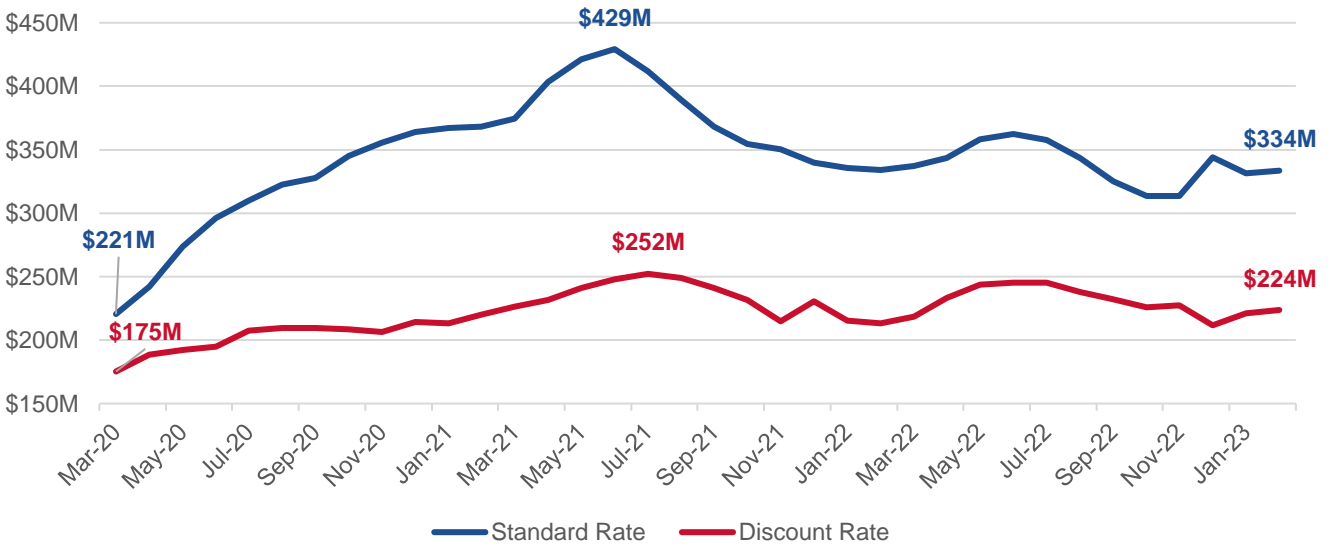
**Chart 3: Average Amount Owed by Discount and Standard Rate Customers, March 2020 – February 2023**



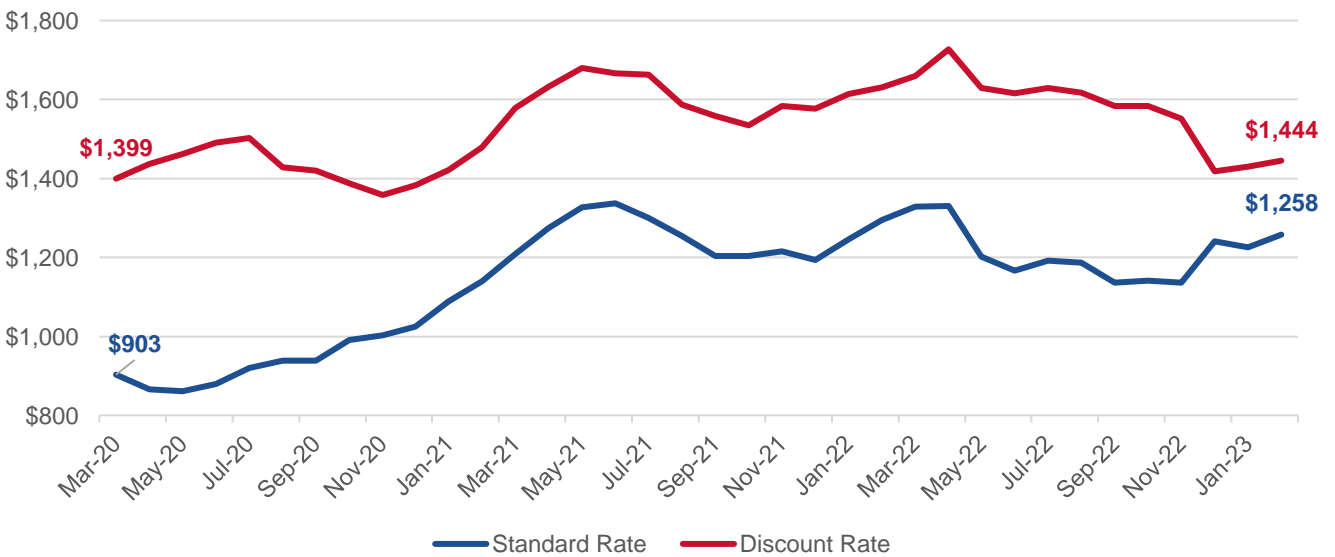
**Chart 4: Percent of Standard Rate and Discount Rate Residential Customers in Arrears More Than 90 Days Behind on Their Bills, March 2020 – February 2023**



**Chart 5: Dollar Amount Owed by Standard and Discount Rate Customers More Than 90 Days Behind on Their Bills, March 2020 – February 2023**



**Chart 6: Average Amount Owed by Discount and Standard Rate Customers More Than 90 Days Behind on Their Bills, March 2020 – February 2023**



For more information, contact National Consumer Law Center Research & Data Assistant Anna Kowanko ([akowanko@nclc.org](mailto:akowanko@nclc.org)) and Senior Staff Attorney Charlie Harak ([charak@nclc.org](mailto:charak@nclc.org)).