

August 5, 2020

**VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL**

Luly E. Massaro, Commission Clerk  
Rhode Island Public Utilities Commission  
89 Jefferson Boulevard  
Warwick, RI 02888

**RE: Docket 4770 – Electric Base Distribution Rates for Rate Year 3 – Compliance Filing Responses to PUC Data Requests – Set 1**

Dear Ms. Massaro:

On behalf of National Grid,<sup>1</sup> I enclose an electronic version<sup>2</sup> of the Company's responses to the Public Utilities Commission's First Set of Data Requests issued in the above-referenced matter.

Thank you very much for your time and attention to this matter. If you have any questions, please contact me at 401-784-7288.

Very truly yours,



Jennifer Brooks Hutchinson

Enclosures

cc: Docket 4770 Service List  
Linda George  
John Bell, Division  
Al Mancini, Division  
Leo Wold, Esq.  
Christy Hetherington, Esq.

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<sup>1</sup> The Narragansett Electric Company d/b/a National Grid (National Grid or the Company).

<sup>2</sup> Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic emergency period, the Company is providing a PDF version of the above-referenced transmittal. The Company will provide the PUC with a hard copy and, if needed, additional hard copies at a later date.

The Narragansett Electric Company  
d/b/a National Grid  
RIPUC Docket No. 4770  
In Re: Electric and Gas Distribution Rate Filing – Rate Year 3  
Responses to the Commission’s First Set of Data Requests  
Issued on July 15, 2020

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PUC 1-1

Request:

If a customer can prove participation in the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program, absent any other program participation, do they qualify for the applicable low-income rate?

Response:

Participation in the Women, Infants and Children (“WIC”) program does not qualify a customer for the Low-Income Rate (A-60) as outlined in the availability provision of R.I.P.U.C. No. 2215, effective January 15, 2019. This provision was last revised effective September 1, 2018 in conjunction with the Company’s Amended Settlement Agreement in Docket No. 4770 and the same provision is in effect in the Company’s gas tariff applicable for the two gas low-income rate classes. Please see the response to PUC 1-2 for additional discussion on eligibility for the Company’s low-income rates.

PUC 1-2

Request:

If the response to PUC 1-1 is in the negative, is there a reason the program is not included in the tariff as a way to qualify for the low-income rates?

Response:

Historically, to be eligible for the Company’s electric and gas low-income rates in Rhode Island, a customer had to be receiving benefits from specific programs (except for the low-income home energy assistance program (“LIHEAP”), for which a customer only had to show eligibility). In the Company’s 2017 general rate case, it changed the structure of the way electric and gas low-income discounts were provided and at the same time updated the eligibility requirements to reflect the current names of the programs that had historically been used to determine eligibility. Currently, to be eligible for the low-income rates, a customer must be eligible for LIHEAP or be receiving Supplemental Security Income from the Social Security Administration or be receiving one of the following from the appropriate Rhode Island agencies: Medicaid, Food Stamps/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP), General Public Assistance, or the Rhode Island Works Program (formerly known as Family Independence Program) or successor programs.

The federal eligibility requirements for the WIC program can be found at the following link: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/wic-eligibility-requirements>. These requirements are different than the eligibility requirements for the Company’s electric and gas low-income rates. First, certain categorical and nutritional requirements for WIC are not applicable to a determination of eligibility for the low-income rates. Second, to meet the income requirement, a WIC applicant must have income at or below an established income standard or be determined automatically income-eligible based on their eligibility to participate in certain programs: SNAP, Medicaid, or the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, formerly known as Aid to Families with Dependent Children, which funds the Rhode Island Works Program in Rhode Island. Unlike the Company’s low-income rates, there does not appear to be a requirement that WIC applicants actually be receiving benefits from these assistance programs.

For these reasons, WIC, in and of itself, could expand the number of customers qualifying for the Company’s electric and gas low-income rates. Customers would not be required to receive benefits, but only would need to show eligibility to receive benefits through these programs to be deemed automatically income-eligible. Expanding the low-income discount to a wider group of qualifying customers would necessitate socializing the incremental costs to all other customers, thereby increasing the cost of the low-income rate<sup>[HJ1]S</sup>. Expanding the low-income discount to

PUC 1-2, page 2

include WIC as a qualifying program is policy decision that should be made with input from all interested stakeholders.

Notwithstanding the above, it is still possible that a WIC applicant could nonetheless qualify for the electric and gas low-income rates if he/she meets the income standard for WIC and meets the other qualifications for the low-income rates.

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PUC 1-3

Request:

If a customer can prove participation in the WIC program, absent any other program participation, does the Company code their account as protected for purposes of the Commission’s Rules and Regulations Governing the Termination of Residential Electric, Gas, and Water Utility Service (Termination Rules)? If so, how do they prove participation?

Response:

No, the Company does not code an account as protected if a customer can prove participation in the WIC program, absent any other program participation. Please see the Company’s response to PUC 1-2 for an explanation of why WIC, in and of itself, is not a qualifying program for the Company’s low-income rates.

The Narragansett Electric Company  
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PUC 1-4

Request:

Please explain whether WIC is only reviewed as a form of income on the Financial Hardship statement or if it is used by itself as evidence that a customer should be coded as a protected customer separate from filling out the Financial Hardship statement.

Response:

The Company does not review WIC as a form of income on the Financial Hardship statement. Also, the Company does not use WIC by itself as evidence that a customer should be coded as a protected customer. Please see the Company’s response to PUC 1-2 for an explanation of why WIC, in and of itself, is not a qualifying program for the Company’s low-income rates.

PUC 1-5

Request:

If the response to PUC 1-3 is in the affirmative, is that customer offered the protected customer payment plans in the event they need a payment plan? If the response to PUC 1-3 is in the negative, why is it no?

Response:

The Company follows the Commission’s Rules and Regulations Governing the Termination of Residential Electric, Gas, and Water Utility Service (the Termination Rules) in determining which customers qualify for “protected status”. The Termination Rules contain specific criteria for establishing protected status, which do not include participation in WIC, absent meeting other criteria. *See* Section 1.2.A.5 (a – f). Please also see the Company’s response to PUC 1-2 for an explanation of why WIC, in and of itself, is not a qualifying program for the Company’s low-income rates. For these reasons, the Company does not code an account as protected if a customer can prove participation in the WIC program, absent any other program participation and otherwise meeting the criteria for protected status under the Termination Rules. Therefore, the Company would not offer such a customer a protected payment plan; however, as discussed in the Company’s response to PUC 1-2, a customer who participates in WIC may still qualify for the Company’s low-income rates if he/she otherwise meets the criteria. This same rationale would apply in the case of a protected status customer. For example, a WIC participant, who also receives LIHEAP benefits would qualify for protected status under the Termination Rules and would be eligible to receive a protected payment plan from the Company.

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PUC 1-6

Request:

If the answer to PUC 1-3 is in the affirmative and PUC 1-1 is in the negative, is the Company able to determine how many customers are coded as protected because of WIC but are not on the low income rate? If so, how many are there?

Response:

Please refer to the Company’s responses to PUC 1-2, PUC 1-3, and PUC 1-5.

Certificate of Service

I hereby certify that a copy of the cover letter and any materials accompanying this certificate was electronically transmitted to the individuals listed below.

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Joanne M. Scanlon

\*\*\*\*\*5i | i gh), 2020\*\*\*  
Date

**National Grid Docket No. 4770 (Rate Application) & Docket No. 4780 (PST)  
Combined Service list updated 7/8/2020**

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