

State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations

Public Utilities Commission

Minutes of Emergency Open Meeting Held on March 16, 2020

An Open Meeting of the Public Utilities Commission was held on Monday, March 16, 2020 at 2:00 P.M. in Hearing Room A, 89 Jefferson Boulevard, Warwick, Rhode Island to discuss, deliberate, and/or vote on the following dockets.

In attendance: Chairperson Margaret Curran, Commissioner Abigail Anthony, Cynthia Wilson-Frias, Alan Nault, Todd Bianco and Luly Massaro. Commissioner Marion Gold and staff Margaret Hogan and John Harrington were not present.

Chairperson Curran called the Open Meeting to order at 2:00 P.M. A quorum was present.

Chairperson Curran moved to find that this meeting is deemed necessary to address an unexpected occurrence that requires immediate action to protect the public. Commissioner Anthony seconded the motion and the was motion unanimously passed. **Vote 2-0.**

Chairperson Curran moved to find that pursuant to R.I. Gen Law § 39-1-32(a), that public safety requires an immediate order, of temporary duration, to protect the welfare of the people. Commissioner Anthony seconded the motion and the motion was unanimously passed. **Vote 2-0.**

Chairperson Curran moved to enter an order, that effective March 16, 2020, all electric, natural gas, water, and sewer utilities regulated by the Public Utilities Commission shall immediately cease certain collections activities, as set forth below, including termination of service for nonpayment. This order shall be in effect through March 31, 2020 for non-residential customer accounts and through April 15, 2020 for residential accounts, subject to further review. Commissioner Anthony seconded the motion and the motion was unanimously passed. **Vote 2-0.**

From March 16, 2020 through April 15, 2020, any residential customer whose utility service has been terminated by National Grid for non-payment or who has a Termination date scheduled will be entitled to have such service restored by National Grid upon satisfaction of certain conditions:

- (a) for a customer owing less than \$1000, 10% of the balance owed must be paid and the remainder of that balance must be paid within 18 months;
- (b) for a customer owing at least \$1000 but less than \$2500, 10% of the balance owed must be paid and the remainder of that balance must be paid within 24 months;
- (c) for a customer owing \$2500 or more, 10% of the balance owed must be paid and the remainder of that balance must be paid within 36 months unless the Company chooses to extend such time period;

In addition to the down payments specified above, customers must pay current bills within the time period allowed by National Grid. A formal commitment to receive funds from any

social service agency by April 15, 2020 for all or part of the additional down payment shall be considered compliance with the provisions of the Rules, provided that the customer has satisfied the other conditions set forth above.

Collections activities under this order include termination of service, sending past due accounts to collections agencies, and sending termination notices with disconnection dates prior to the end of the stated period. Allowed collections activities include billing, reminder notices, entering payment plans, and other activities not prohibited by this order. Customers are encouraged to continue to pay their bills to the extent they have the financial ability. Nonpayment results in higher balances that can become even more challenging over time.

Utilities are encouraged to offer flexible payment plans to all customers facing financial hardship, even short-term, during this time. In addition, there are likely to be customers who do not currently qualify for National Grid's electric or gas discount rate for income-eligible customers who, because of short-term unemployment, could experience a reduction in their annual income this year such that it will bring them within the income guidelines. National Grid customer service representatives should ensure they are screening customers for this when customers call into the call center.

Additionally, Chairperson Curran moved that:

1) On March 30, 2020, the PUC will revisit this order with respect to non-residential customers. At that time, the PUC will decide whether to extend this order. The PUC invites public comment on this matter to be submitted by March 26, 2020. The utilities should provide the following information by March 26, 2020: (1) Have collections dropped off for nonresidential customers over the past two weeks compared to prior months and prior years? (2) If so, please quantify the extent of the reduction. (3) What effect has any such reduction had on the utility's cash flow? (4) Has the utility been unable to meet any obligations, or does it expect to be unable to meet any financial obligations in the next two weeks if it cannot commence termination of service as a collections option.

2) On April 13, 2020, the PUC will revisit this order with respect to residential customers to determine whether to extend the winter moratorium for protected customers and/or whether to extend the emergency order to all residential customers. The PUC invites public comment on this matter to be submitted by April 7, 2020.

Commissioner Anthony seconded the motion and the motion was unanimously passed.

Vote 2-0.

Commissioner Anthony further moved that customers enrolled in the Arrearage Management Plan offered by National Grid and Pascoag Utility District are currently disenrolled if they miss more than two payments in a twelve-month period under R.I. Gen. Laws § 39-2-1(d)(2)(ix)(A). A customer enrolled in an arrearage management plan who misses their third payment in their current twelve-month period through April 15, 2020 will not be disenrolled unless they miss another payment in the same twelve-month period. Chairperson Curran seconded the motion and the motion was unanimously passed. **Vote 2-0.**

The Open Meeting adjourned at 2:20 P.M. A video of the Open Meeting discussion can be accessed at <http://www.ustream.tv/channel/WqQyXw296dg>