

**STATE OF RHODE ISLAND
PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION**

**IN RE: THE NARRAGANSETT ELECTRIC CO.
D/B/A RHODE ISLAND ENERGY – LAST RESORT
SERVICE (LR) RATES**

DOCKET NO. 4978

**IN RE: RI ENERGY’S TARIFF ADVICE BILL
CREDIT FOR ELECTRIC AND GAS CUSTOMERS**

DOCKET NO. 22-07-GE

**Supplemental Public Comment
Submitted by the R.I. Center for
Justice on Behalf of the George
Wiley Center**

On September 27, 2022 Rhode Island Energy filed their tariff in Docket No. 22-07-GE setting forth their plan to make payment of the Attorney General Settlement amount of \$32.5 Million in credits to electric distribution customers as of November 1, 2022 and for the credit to appear on the first bill after the effective date of the tariff.

On September 23, 2022 Rhode Island Energy filed Responses to Record Requests 3 and 5 addressing the number of customers typically connecting and disconnecting in any annual cycle (Record Request No. 3) and the impact of a customer joining municipal aggregation on a customer’s budget billing plan (Record Request No. 5).

On September 22, 2022 Rhode Island Energy filed Responses to Record Requests 1, 2 4, and 6.

On September 22, 2022 Rhode Island Energy filed Response to OER 1-2 confirming that no interest or carrying charges are associated with a typical customer budget billing program.

On September 21, 2022 the Office of Energy Resources (OER) filed their response to the PUC Questions for the Parties posed during the evidentiary hearing in Docket 4978 as well as the Response to the Commission’s Hearing Record Requests 1-1 and 1-2 to OER. They confirmed that RGGI credits must be used for “direct rate relief for low-income consumers”.

On September 20, 2022 Rhode Island Energy filed their Supplemental Reply Comments in Docket 22-07-GE clarifying the accounting for the bill credits resulting from the Attorney General Settlement.

DEFER AND SPREAD THE COSTS OF THE RATE INCREASE OVER TWELVE MONTHS:

Based upon these responses and the evidence adduced during the evidentiary hearing on Docket 4978, with some additional evidence introduced during that proceeding relevant to Docket 22-07-GE, the R.I. Center for Justice on behalf of the George Wiley Center continues to advocate for the deferral of a portion of the rate increase approved by the Commission in Docket 4978 such that those costs are spread over 12 months rather than six. Based on the testimony in the hearing and the subsequent filings there will be no material harm to municipal aggregation customers if the costs of the increase are spread over a twelve-month period thus mitigating the extremely harmful impact of the historically unprecedented increase consumers face this winter. We join the OER in asserting that any stranded costs later identified due to customers leaving LRS service for municipal aggregation can be equitably distributed to all customers through a future proceeding focused on addressing that specific issue.

APPLY THE RGGI CREDIT FOR LOW-INCOME CUSTOMERS OVER TWO MONTHS:

We also join OER in continuing to advocate for the distribution of the RGGI credits to low-income customers over two months, presumably December 2022 and January 2023 following on the application of the Attorney General's bill credit in November 2022. If that sequence becomes delayed for any reason the operative months may become December 2022 (Attorney General's credit) and January and February 2022 (RGGI credit). This recommendation is, for the Center for Justice on behalf of the Wiley Center, predicated in part on the fact that new customers will continue to enroll in the low-income discount throughout the winter months. The evidence in the hearing confirmed the fact that there are many Rhode Islanders eligible for the low-income discount who for a variety of reasons are not enrolled. This is not a new problem, this has been the fact since the establishment of the discount program and is a problem that historically confronts most programs of this kind nationally. Given this reality however it is likely that the RGGI credits will have a positive impact for a slightly broader group of low-income customers if spread over two months to capture new low-income discount enrollees during the period between today and January 2022.

NO INTEREST COMPONENT OR CARRYING CHARGES DUE TO LAG IN CASH FLOW:

Rhode Island Energy has acknowledged that no interest or carrying charges are associated with lag in cash flow during the twelve month period of a typical budget billing customer plan. (OER 1-2) Thus no interest or carrying charges should be associated with any actions taken by the PUC to defer and spread costs of the rate increase over a twelve-month period as it will have the equivalent economic effect to the enrollment of all customers in a budget billing program.

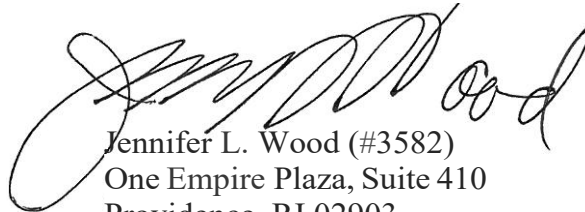
REDUCE THE \$6.00 RESIDENTIAL CUSTOMER CHARGE TO ZERO FOR ALL RESIDENTIAL CUSTOMERS FOR THE SIX MONTH PERIOD:

Finally, we continue to advocate for the reduction to zero of the \$6.00 Residential Customer Charge for the six-month period relevant to Docket 4978 and to assert that when the deferred costs of this charge are recovered they should be equitably recovered through a separate mechanism through a future proceeding, not by doubling up the charge for residential customers

at the conclusion of the period of reduction of the charge.

Looking to the future, it is evident that volatility of energy costs is going to be a continuing challenge for Rhode Islanders and for the global economy due to a constellation of factors testified to during the evidentiary hearing. The only permanent mechanism to mitigate the impact of future extreme rate increases on low-income ratepayers is to decouple the sustainable utility payment from the supply cost for the most economically challenged Rhode Islanders through the implementation of a multi-tiered discount linked to low-income customer income (sometimes referred to as a Percent of Income Payment Plan.) For the lowest income Rhode Islanders whose income may actually be lower than their combined rent and utility bills, paying a utility rate linked to a percent of their income is literally the only sustainable approach for them to be able to reliably pay their utility bills and thus remain connected to life-sustaining utility service. Without an income linked discount rate for the lowest income customers, the PUC will be perpetually confronting the need for extraordinary mitigation efforts to protect these most vulnerable customers from a structural denial of access to utility service.

Respectfully submitted,



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Dated: September 28, 2022

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on August 1, 2022, I sent a true copy of this document by electronic mail to the parties in the Docket 4978 and Docket 22-07-GE Service Lists as of September 28, 2022.