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Public Utility Commission of Oregon
201 High St. SE, Suite 100
Salem, OR 97301

RE: AR 601 Severe Weather Moratorium on Involuntary Disconnection

Please find CUB's response to the questions posed by Oregon Public Utility Commission (Commission) staff during the opening AR 601 workshop – severe weather moratorium on involuntary disconnection.

1) Should the rule allow each utility the discretion to formulate its own plan incorporating minimum standards to be set by rule or should the Commission prescribe the severe weather moratorium standard?

The current practice of voluntary severe weather moratorium procedures developed by individual utilities is poor public policy by offering varying degrees of customer protection. The current policy relies too heavily on utility service area and, in some cases, the manager serving that community on a given day. What concerns CUB is the reliance on judgement calls based on either minimal or unclear criteria.

Given problematic elements of voluntary severe weather disconnection policies, CUB would prefer the clarity and consistency of the Commission prescribing the severe weather moratorium standard.

CUB does not believe that individual utilities should formulate individual plans. CUB believes that the Commission should prescribe a clear and consistent severe weather moratorium standard with which all Oregon-operating IOUs need comply.

Were the Commission to set even minimum standards while allowing the utilities to incorporate individual plans – this would be a vast improvement over the status quo. Yet, this is certainly not an argument against the Commission prescribing a clear and consistent statewide standard.

Involuntary disconnection of utility services providing either heating or cooling in the event of extreme weather events carries serious health risks for customers. This is especially true for low-income customers – but particularly those living on fixed incomes who are often elderly and/or face chronic health concerns.

Providing consistency statewide would also address socio-economic concerns faced by customers statewide. That such consistency may or may not have differential effects on utilities based on their geographic service-territory is of little concern to CUB. This is a business reality, and business realities do not justify policies that unduly burden the health and/or safety of low-income and at-risk customers facing service disconnections.

2) Should there be different triggers for different geographic areas (e.g., Eastern Oregon vs Western Oregon vs Southern Oregon)?

No. Extreme cold – 32 Fahrenheit – is extreme cold and extreme hot – National Weather Service (NWS) heat advisory – is extreme hot.

CUB understands that Oregon is a geographically and, as such, climactically diverse state. Eastern and Central Oregon territories experience freezing conditions many more days in the year than other parts of the State.

It is for this reason that Eastern and Central Oregon customers would benefit from a statewide extreme weather moratorium policy. The goal of a severe weather moratorium policy is to protect customers from severe weather. CUB has not heard or read sufficient evidence to the contrary.

3) What are the appropriate winter and summer temperature triggers?

As a winter trigger, CUB continues to recommend 32 Fahrenheit. 32 Fahrenheit is the demarcation between freezing and non-freezing conditions.

Most U.S. states with cold weather moratorium policies use 32 Fahrenheit as the marker.

Not only do customers understand 32 Fahrenheit as a logical marker, the scientific reality is accompanied by the onset of increased likelihood of negative health impacts.

Freezing temperatures also create difficult travel conditions. Such conditions limit mobility for more vulnerable populations such as seniors and people with disabilities.

As a summer trigger, CUB recommends National Weather Service heat advisories. Heat advisories are set by the National Weather Service based on high heat and humidity, and are intended to signal the increased likelihood of negative health impacts such as heat stroke.

CUB is open to discussion around a summer temperature trigger, but feels strongly that NWS heat advisories more accurately implicate increased health risks for the customer.

4) Discussion of period of time trigger must be met before a moratorium is initiated (e.g. 24 hours, 48 hours).

CUB endorses a 24-hour (daily) moratorium. In the initial AR 601 workshop, it was evident that each utility employs separate but similar methodologies for weather forecasting. I.e. some determine conditions at 7:00am, while others at 10:00am. CUB is less concerned with the methodology if there is one in place. Each utility should describe this methodology and the reasoning behind it.

5) How long should the moratorium remain in effect and under what conditions should it bend?

The moratorium should remain in place for the length of time during which the extreme weather conditions persist. Evaluation of weather conditions should be made every 24 hours.

CUB understands that weather prediction is, at times, quite accurate.

Therefore, in an event where a utility identifies an *extreme* likelihood of extreme weather conditions over several days, the utility should have the option to establish a moratorium for whatever length the utility deems appropriate and necessary to protect vulnerable customers.

6. Are there other circumstances under which a moratorium should be put into effect?

Prescribing a severe weather moratorium based on a statewide standard for all customers would best capture the most vulnerable customers – low-income; elderly; and those living with disability.

That said, there are other circumstances under which moratorium on involuntary service disconnections are appropriate. For example: medical certificate holders. CUB does not suggest that disconnection moratorium for severe weather is the only appropriate application.