



**Portland General Electric Company**  
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June 7, 2022

*Via Electronic Filing*  
Public Utility Commission of Oregon  
Attn: Filing Center  
201 High Street, S.E.  
P.O. Box 1088  
Salem, OR 97308-1088

**RE: AR 653, Third Round Joint Utility Response to Recommended Changes to Division 21 of the Oregon Administrative Rules**

Dear Filing Center:

Avista Utilities, Cascade Natural Gas, Idaho Power Company, NW Natural, PacifiCorp d/b/a Pacific Power, and Portland General Electric Company (collectively "the Joint Utilities") continue to appreciate this collaborative effort to strengthen certain protections for low income electric and gas utility customers within Division 21 of the Oregon Administrative Rules (OAR). The comments presented here, in response to the third iteration of proposed Division 21 changes posted on May 23, 2022 in AR 653, further detail the Joint Utilities' concerns about unintended impacts associated with certain changes proposed to the existing collections processes, and disconnection and reconnection policies.

**Collections Process**

*Notice Timeframe*

The Joint Utilities continue to be concerned about customer confusion in changing the requirement of a 15-day notice to a 20-day notice. Currently, each utility provides customers with a grace period from when their bill is due until when an initial notice of disconnection generates.<sup>1</sup> This grace period prevents customers who might pay their bill a few days late or mail in a check on the bill's due date from receiving an initial notice of disconnection.

If the Joint Utilities are required to add an additional 5-days into the disconnection noticing timeframe, some utilities will need to shorten their current grace period in order to accommodate the change. This will cause customers who typically pay a few days late to start receiving disconnection notices when they hadn't prior and may also result in customers receiving overlapping disconnection notices with differing past-due balances and disconnection dates. Such a situation would create an inconsistent and confusing customer experience as the customer may not know how much they need to pay and by when to avoid disconnection of service.

With the customer protections currently in place, customers can prevent receiving a disconnection notice or being disconnected through a myriad of ways such as setting up a

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<sup>1</sup> Table 1 of Staff's Report for the December 16, 2021 Special Public Meeting, Docket No. UM 2114.

Time-Payment Arrangement, seeking energy assistance, setting up a Preferred Due Date, etc. It is also unclear if there is any empirical data to support that adding additional days in the collections process will result in a different outcome. The Joint Utilities believe requiring the 15-day notice be changed to a 20-day notice reduces utilities' flexibility, does not provide a clear benefit, and may cause unintended consequences and/or confusion for some customers and therefore recommend leaving the 15-day notice requirement intact.

#### *Disconnection Hours*

The Joint Utilities appreciate the Joint Advocates' concern that the field disconnection process allows for same-day reconnections where practicable. With regard to Staff's proposal to make permanent the Stipulated Agreement's provision outlining the hours when disconnections should occur, the Joint Utilities request adding flexibility in the proposed rule's language that would still make clear best efforts are to be taken when scheduling disconnection activity but not specify the 8:00 am to 2:00 pm timeframe.

Additionally, electric utilities who can perform remote reconnections ask to be excluded from the proposed rule's requirements. Electric utilities with the capability to remotely reconnect are able to facilitate responsive, same-day reconnection of service, within reason. There are different requirements being proposed for electric utilities with remote capabilities regarding waiver of reconnection fees, so it is reasonable to have differing rules from gas utilities in this scenario as well.

#### *Collections at the Door*

The Joint Utilities ask that the addition to 860-021-0405 (11), regarding the requirement to provide 24 hours for a customer to make adequate payment following a disconnection visit where personal contact is made at the residence, be struck from the rules. The Joint Utilities provide regular communications to all of their customers on how and where they may pay their bills. As such, customers bear the responsibility to make payment prior to their potential disconnection and should not be granted an additional 24 hours to do so. This new requirement would cause additional, unnecessary truck rolls leading to increased costs for all customers, especially with the new requirement to waive the first field visit charge for low-income residential customers.

#### **Severe Weather Protections**

The Joint Utilities appreciate the concerns expressed by the Joint Advocates regarding severe weather protections and continue to employ flexibility within OARs and utility policies to minimize disconnections. The Joint Utilities understand the importance of keeping customers connected during Winter cold spells; however, it is important to recognize that by removing the word "high" from the current rule, such that a moratorium would be in effect when the forecasted temperature is below 32 degrees at any point in the day, it will effectively lead to a winter moratorium for credit disconnections lasting from Fall to Spring in many areas of the State. It is not uncommon for many cities in Oregon to have a 15- or 20-degree difference

between the day's high and low temperature projections. With the additional protections being added through this rulemaking to protect customers from disconnection, the Joint Utilities do not support this proposed change.

The Joint Utilities also recommend removal of the winter storm warning from Staff's proposal as a storm warning can often be brief or a nonevent and ask to keep the rule objective. With the addition of reconnecting customers who were disconnected in the previous 72 hours of the severe weather moratorium, there could be customers who are disconnected and reconnected multiple times in a week if these additional protections are approved.

As Staff stated in their recommendation, these changes would make Oregon have one of the strongest severe weather moratoriums in the nation. The Joint Utilities do not believe this is necessary as Oregon is not known as a state with extreme weather. The Joint Utilities will assist customers in severe weather situations and will always consider what is safe for its employees, customers, energy system, and the communities it serves when making decisions that affect customers' service.

### **Summary**

The Joint Utilities appreciate and support Staff's request to open a formal rule making for AR653. The Joint Utilities will continue to examine some of the finer points within Division 21 and look forward to engaging in further conversations.

Thank you,

/s/ Shawn Bonfield  
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Avista Utilities

/s/ Connie Aschenbrenner  
Rate Design Manager  
Idaho Power Company

/s/ Robert Meredith  
Director, Pricing and Tariff Policy  
PacifiCorp

/s/ Christopher Mickelson  
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/s/ Natasha Siores  
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