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## PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

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### Maryland Public Service Commission Proposes Regulations to Benefit Utility Choice Customers

(BALTIMORE) – The Maryland Public Service Commission today moved forward to publish in the *Maryland Register* for notice and comment, proposed regulations that will improve Maryland’s electric and gas retail choice supplier market for the benefit of Maryland customers. The proposed regulations are the result of a collaborative process involving competitive suppliers, consumer advocacy groups, regulated utility companies and Commission Staff.

“The Commission’s proposed regulations are intended to address the difficulties that customers with variable rate contracts experienced during the 2014 polar vortex,” stated Chairman Kevin Hughes. The proposed regulations have additional goals of increasing consumer knowledge about retail choice products and strengthening the retail choice supplier market.

The proposed regulations:

1. Require electric and gas suppliers to provide more information to customers by:
  - Requiring suppliers to make available to customers any rate change at least 12 days prior to the proposed change;
  - Requiring that suppliers provide direct notice to customers switching from fixed to variable rates of substantial rate increases; and

(more)

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- Requiring suppliers to provide new customers with a clear contract summary including basic terms such as price structure (fixed or variable), supply price, incentives, contract length, cancellation and early termination fees, and renewal terms.
2. Facilitate more electric customer choice by:
    - Permitting customers to switch to a new supplier in three business days – from a previous switching time of up to one month;
    - Allowing customers unable to reach their supplier to initiate a drop of supplier service via their utility after only three days; and
    - Requiring suppliers to publish an online listing of their available prices and offers.
  3. Improve supplier oversight of third-party agents by:
    - Requiring suppliers to develop minimum qualifications for their agents;
    - Mandating that agents selling door-to-door pass a criminal background check;
    - Requiring suppliers to ensure their agents are properly trained in responsible and ethical sales practices;
    - Making suppliers liable for any unlawful fraudulent or deceptive marketing practices of third-party agents; and
    - Requiring supplier marketers to clearly identify themselves and the company they represent.
  4. Expand the investigative authority of the Commission's Office of External Relations (OER) to allow OER to investigate allegations of violations when made aware of it, and without a consumer complaint to move the investigation.

Final adoption and implementation of the proposed regulations may follow initial publication in the *Maryland Register*, with a subsequent comment period to consider any changes. Adoption of final regulations will be posted to the PSC's website, [www.psc.state.md.us](http://www.psc.state.md.us).

**About the Public Service Commission:**

*The Maryland Public Service Commission regulates electric and gas utilities, telephone companies (land lines), certain water and sewer companies, passenger motor vehicle carriers for hire (sedans, limousines and buses), taxicab companies (in Baltimore City and County, Cumberland and Hagerstown) and bay pilot rates.*