

ORDER NO. 90728

Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic on
Maryland’s Gas and Electric Utility
Operations and Customer Experiences

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BEFORE THE
PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION
OF MARYLAND

PC53

Issue Date: August 4, 2023

ORDER ON DATA REPORTING METRICS

On August 31, 2020 the Maryland Public Service Commission adopted consumer protection measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ As part of that docket, the Commission also established ongoing reporting requirements for tracking the impact of COVID-19 on customers and utilities. On December 28, 2022, after holding a legislative-style hearing, the Commission lifted the remaining August 2020 pandemic-related customer protection requirements, effective April 1, 2023.² That order left intact the ongoing reporting requirements,³ however, and established a workgroup to finalize a draft reporting template and provide any feedback on the existing reporting and

¹ On its own motion, the Commission adopted the following measures: extending the moratorium on utility service terminations; invalidating previously sent service termination notices; extending the notice requirement for service termination to 45 days; setting minimum repayment terms; waiving down payment and deposit requirements; and establishing provisions for negotiating payment plans.

² Order No. 90455.

³ As continued and modified in Order No. 90333.

additional or alternative metrics to ensure the usefulness and uniformity of the dataset going forward.

On June 7, 2023, the workgroup leader filed a Report, providing recommendations and decision points related to the draft reporting template and additional data reporting metrics.

After reviewing the workgroup's Report, the Commission now adopts the recommendations of the Report and directs the affected utilities to file comments and cost estimates as described below.

Workgroup Report

The workgroup's Report identified areas of consensus and non-consensus between the workgroup's members and provided a set of recommended Commission actions.

The workgroup attached to its Report a proposed data reporting template, formatted in Microsoft Excel. The template has full consensus from the workgroup participants.

The workgroup also reached consensus on a universal set of definitions for use in future PC53 data reporting. The workgroup noted that individual utilities had individualized arrearage and collection timelines for such issues as payment due dates, late fee dates, and termination notice dates, as shown in Table 2 of the Report. The workgroup members agreed that reporting definitions should be based on individual utility timelines.

The workgroup considered the existing metrics currently reported, modifications to those metrics, and proposed new metrics. The workgroup reached consensus on the pre-existing metrics and modifications thereto.⁴ The workgroup was unable to reach consensus on which of the new metrics should be reported and how (times per year, granularity, etc.).

The Report explained that the utilities would be able to continue reporting on the pre-existing metrics with modifications with minimal cost changes. Some, but not all, of the utilities within the workgroup provided rough estimates of the costs involved and time required to begin reporting on the proposed metrics. Several utilities stated that certain metrics would require a manual process for collection. The utilities stated that final estimates would depend on what data metrics the Commission ultimately determines should be reported.

The workgroup recommended that the Commission direct the utilities to file a compliance plan within 45 days of its order, addressing their individual implementation issues and associated costs. The workgroup also recommended the Commission consider waiver/extension requests as necessary.

The workgroup also noted that the Office of People’s Counsel (“OPC”) proposed that utilities should contact and refer customers to the Office of Home Energy Programs (“OHEP”) either prior to a termination notice being sent or by including that information on the termination notice. OPC also proposed that utilities include a phone number for OHEP and a link to OHEP’s website in its customer portals and with its online “bill pay” features.

⁴ A list of those metrics is at pages 9-10 of the Report.

Commission Decision

In Order No. 90455, the Commission noted that this data is a valuable resource for setting future energy assistance policy and customer protections in Maryland and should be provided in a uniform, easily-decipherable format. The Commission appreciates the work of the workgroup members in developing this revised reporting template.

The Commission approves the consensus items: the definitions list; the timelines; the template and format; and the consensus metrics and criteria (customer type, income status, etc.). The Commission also finds value in each of the proposed “new metrics” identified in the Report. The Commission desires to adopt all of the new metrics, seeing value in the information. However the Commission notes that some utilities have expressed reservations about the difficulties and costs of complying with some of the data requirements, however. The Commission therefore directs the relevant utilities to file individualized comments and detailed and specific cost estimates for compliance, assuming adoption of all consensus and non-consensus metrics, by September 18, 2023. Comments should identify any implementation issues, such as where specific metrics pose particular difficulties or significant costs that the Commission should be aware of before making its final decision. Comments should also include incremental costs for each of the non-consensus metrics. Comments should also address the proposal of OPC identified above. Parties may file comments on the cost and implementation information provided by the utilities by **October 2, 2023**.

IT IS THEREFORE, this 4th day of August, in the year of Two Thousand Twenty-Three, by the Public Service Commission of Maryland,

ORDERED that: (1) Utilities subject to existing reporting in PC53 shall file comments addressing the issues identified above by September 18, 2023.

(2) Other parties may file responsive comments by **October 2, 2023**.

/s/ Frederick H. Hoover _____

/s/ Michael T. Richard _____

/s/ Anthony J. O'Donnell _____

/s/ Kumar P. Barve _____

/s/ Bonnie A. Suchman _____

Commissioners