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PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

For Immediate Release

Maryland Public Service Commission Adopts Theft of Energy Regulations; Announces Public Safety Opportunity for Local Governments

(BALTIMORE—August 16, 2016) – The Maryland Public Service Commission has approved final regulations that impose new notification requirements for service termination, utility reporting of theft of energy and allows local governments to access service termination information in order to provide assistance to individuals and families. The regulations took effect August 29 and give utilities until January 1, 2017 to establish the local government notification system.

In March 2015, Rodney Todd of Princess Anne, and seven of his children, died of carbon monoxide poisoning after using a generator to heat their home. The home's meter had been removed after it was discovered that it had been stolen from another vacant house and attached to the Todd residence. Before today, under Maryland regulations, utility service could be terminated without notice for a "customer's unauthorized use of service by any method, including diversion of gas or electricity around a meter," and that policy applied even during extreme temperatures.

At the urging of Senator James N. Mathias, Jr. (Somerset County), Obi Linton, the Director of the Commission's Office of External Relations, along with the Commission's Technical Staff and other stakeholders, drafted proposed regulations to improve the way Maryland addresses service turn-offs that occur for reasons other than non-payment.

"As electric consumption technology changes, the utility companies are better able to detect unauthorized use, thus causing enforcement action," said Senator Mathias. "However, innocent residents can be affected through immediate service termination.

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The tragic loss of the Todd family in my district caused me to work effectively with the Public Service Commission and other stakeholders to improve our policy, and likely save innocent lives in the future. I am most gratified for this team effort.”

Utilities may terminate service without notice if there are hazardous conditions on the premises, if the utility’s equipment has been tampered with, or if there is unauthorized use of electricity or gas service. If service is terminated due to an allegation of meter tampering, the utility must notify the occupants in person or by posting a written notice on the premises (or sending it by mail in certain instances). The notice must include safety precautions, including warnings of the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning from portable generators, energy assistance and information on how to have service reconnected.

“Our goal with these regulations is to make sure individuals and families have every avenue possible to obtain utility services in a way that is safe and lawful,” said W. Kevin Hughes, Chairman of the Maryland PSC. “This new process also gives local governments the information and resources they need to assist residents whose utility service has been terminated for theft or for use without an active account.”

After service at a premise is terminated due to an allegation of theft, the utility must notify the Commission within one day. The PSC will add the address of the service termination to an electronic database for access by local governments who may wish to provide assistance to the occupants.

Under the regulations, utilities must maintain records of service terminations due to allegations of energy theft for three years and file annual reports with the Commission.

In the event that theft of energy is not alleged but service is being used without an active account, a utility must now provide written notice to the occupant in person at least three days prior to service termination (seven days prior if the notice is mailed). The notice must also invite the occupant to apply for service and include utility contact information.

Local officials may contact the Office of External Relations at 1-800-492-0474 for further information.

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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, buses, Uber, Lyft), taxicab companies (in Baltimore City and County, Cumberland and Hagerstown) and bay pilot rates.

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