



September 8, 2020

Small Business Utility Advocates (“SBUA”) Public Comment for September 8, 2020 Special Public Meeting

SBUA acknowledges the work of Staff in these proceedings which have required a lot of time that would be spent on other matters but for the COVID emergency causing business closure and limitations.<sup>1</sup> SBUA really appreciates the Staff and other participants working on this matter and discussing the small customer class and including it in this Energy Term Sheet, and as SBUA evaluates, we note certain concerns identified here below.<sup>2</sup>

1) SBUA is concerned about the base information considered by the group regarding small commercial customers. There is less utility data presented in COVID proceedings with regard to small commercial regarding arrearages and disconnections. But the impact on small businesses of the COVID related limits is significant. It appears that for Avista small commercial had larger percentages increase in arrearages than residential, and the percentage of the amounts of arrearages of commercial are much greater than the amounts other customers, and the arrearage dollars compared to revenue is three times higher for Avista commercial to residential, and PGE with higher percentage increase among commercial customers’ shorter arrearages but much lower percentage longer term than residential. Other national data is available for use by jurisdictions regarding the impact of closure orders on small business.<sup>3</sup>

Anecdotal input must not serve as the basis for decisions regarding small commercial customers. Staff-facilitated COVID group discussion has included references primarily focused on residential customers and anecdotal observations by participants regarding the state of Oregon’s small business in the pandemic. SBUA asks that the Commission Staff reach out more to Business Oregon, or other sister agencies, to learn more regarding impacts of COVID on Oregon’s small businesses. While the National Consumer Law Center did participate in the Illinois, SBUA learned that it was not on behalf of small commercial customers which was not represented in the Illinois settlement.

2) The Energy Term Sheet is very broad reaching. In addition to topics of timelines, bad debt, deferrals, an additional 1% surcharge for low-income of which there is no clear benefit to small commercial, this term sheet goes beyond COVID considerations, including the Governor’s EO 20-04, Community Solar program, and rule making at least. Mindful that the different topics are important and that there can be efficient synergies, SBUA is reviewing how small commercial customers would achieve fair relief terms with regard to the different Energy Term Sheet provisions. SBUA is concerned that such terms are too broad to be recommended for small commercial customers currently dealing with other pending utility proceedings and pressing business needs.

To conclude, SBUA is reviewing the Energy Term Sheet for fit and will continue to engage productively.

Respectfully submitted, Diane Henkels, SBUA Counsel [diane@utilityadvocates.org](mailto:diane@utilityadvocates.org)

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<sup>1</sup> Governor Brown’s Stay Home Save Lives Order

<sup>2</sup> SBUA supports many efforts to shore up utility service to low-income customers and to ensure that environmental justice communities are not disproportionately impacted by utility service and energy generation.

<sup>3</sup> Main Street America, “The Impact of Covid-19 on Small Businesses”, [https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/NMSC/390e0055-2395-4d3b-af60-81b53974430d/UploadedImages/Resource\\_Center/COVID\\_19/NM-SC57\\_MSA\\_COVID19IMAPCTSURVEY\\_F.pdf](https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/NMSC/390e0055-2395-4d3b-af60-81b53974430d/UploadedImages/Resource_Center/COVID_19/NM-SC57_MSA_COVID19IMAPCTSURVEY_F.pdf) (Last accessed 9/8/20) *cited in* The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities, D.P.U. 20-58-C of September 3, 2020, Order on Small Commercial Arrearage Loan Forgiveness Program, p 7.