

2019 -- S 0651

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LC001292
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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2019

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A N A C T

RELATING TO PUBLIC UTILITIES AND CARRIERS -- DUTIES OF UTILITIES AND
CARRIERS

Introduced By: Senators Lombardo, Lombardi, Ciccone, Picard, and Euer

Date Introduced: March 21, 2019

Referred To: Senate Commerce

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Chapter 39-2 of the General Laws entitled "Duties of Utilities and Carriers"
2 is hereby amended by adding thereto the following section:

3 **39-2-1.5. Minimum customer service levels.**

4 (a) Every public utility shall provide prompt and adequate customer service to its
5 ratepayers.

6 (b) Each electric distribution company as defined in § 39-1-2 having greater than one
7 hundred thousand (100,000) customers and each gas distribution company included as a public
8 utility as defined in § 39-1-2 having greater than one hundred thousand (100,000) customers shall
9 provide prompt installation of new service and service upgrades to its ratepayers, including
10 providing status updates to ratepayers regarding installation and upgrade-related wait times.

11 (c) The commission shall establish appropriate customer service standards and
12 procedures to implement this section. The commission shall conduct a review at least once every
13 five (5) years to ensure service quality standards and procedures related to this section are
14 sufficient.

15 (d) The commission may evaluate and address the performance of any company that
16 requests a rate increase as part of the rate case review process, in accordance with subsections (a)
17 and (b) of this section. The commission may require improved performance, including proof of
18 improvement, prior to approving any rate increase.

1 (e) Any ratepayer who alleges that an electric distribution company or gas distribution
2 company has failed to provide prompt and adequate customer service, or that the electric
3 distribution company or gas distribution company has failed to promptly install service upgrades
4 or new service in accordance with subsection (b) of this section, may submit a formal or informal
5 complaint with the division. The division shall investigate and rule upon all complaints in an
6 expedited manner and shall provide status updates to the ratepayer as the investigation proceeds.

7 (f) The division shall have the authority to assess a penalty, in accordance with § 39-2-8,
8 against any utility that fails or neglects to provide prompt and adequate customer service, or to
9 promptly install service upgrades or new service, as determined by the division.

10 SECTION 2. Section 39-2-8 of the General Laws in Chapter 39-2 entitled "Duties of
11 Utilities and Carriers" is hereby amended to read as follows:

12 **39-2-8. Penalty for violations.**

13 Any public utility which shall violate any provision of chapters 1 -- 5 of this title, or shall
14 do any act herein prohibited, or shall fail or refuse to perform any duty enjoined upon it for which
15 a penalty has not been provided, shall be subject to a penalty of not less than two hundred dollars
16 (\$200) nor more than ~~one~~ ten thousand dollars ~~(\$1,000)~~ (\$10,000), and in the case of a continuing
17 violation of any of the provisions of ~~the chapters~~ this chapter, every day's continuance thereof
18 shall be deemed to be a separate and distinct offense. Any penalty provided in this section shall
19 not be recoverable from ratepayers in future rates.

20 SECTION 3. Chapter 39-3 of the General Laws entitled "Regulatory Powers of
21 Administration" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following section:

22 **39-3-37.4. Itemized bills -- Electrical distribution company.**

23 (a) Every electrical distribution company which charges for the distribution of electricity
24 to any house, building, tenement or estate, shall provide upon request an itemized bill or
25 statement following any installation, construction, site visit, or other service for which there is
26 any fee to the ratepayer.

27 (b) The electrical distribution company shall provide the requesting ratepayer with a
28 detailed written estimate prior to performing any installation, construction, site visit or other
29 service, unless the total estimated cost for the service is five hundred dollars (\$500) or less.

30 SECTION 4. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF

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1 This act would require public utilities and electric distribution companies to provide
2 prompt and adequate service to its ratepayers relating to new service and service upgrades,
3 subject to a penalty of up to ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) per violation. Electric distribution
4 companies would be required to provide upon request written estimates of any work to be
5 performed of more than five hundred dollars (\$500) and an itemized bill for work performed for
6 any fee payable by the ratepayer.

7 This act would take effect upon passage.

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