

2017 -- S 0886

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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2017

A N A C T

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

Introduced By: Senators Picard, and Lombardo

Date Introduced: May 11, 2017

Referred To: Senate Commerce

(Lieutenant Governor)

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 division shall establish, by rule or regulation, appropriate customer service
12 standards and procedures to implement this section. The division shall conduct a review at least
13 once every five (5) years to ensure rules and regulations related to this section are sufficient.

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

18 (e) Any ratepayer who alleges that a utility has failed to provide prompt and adequate

1 customer service, or that the utility has failed to promptly install service upgrades or new service,
2 may submit a formal or informal complaint with the division. The division shall investigate and
3 rule upon all complaints in an expedited manner and shall provide status updates to the ratepayer
4 as the investigation proceeds.

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

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

10 **39-2-8. Penalty for violations.**

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

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

20 **39-3-37.4. Itemized bills -- Electrical distribution company.**

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

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

28 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 written estimates of any work to be performed of more
5 than five hundred dollars (\$500), with an itemized bill for work performed for any fee payable by
6 the ratepayer.

7 This act would take effect upon passage.

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