

Agenda Date: July 8, 2021  
Item Number: A1

**Docket:** U-200281  
Company Name: Staff Investigation

Staff: Mike Young, Assistant Director for Water and Transportation  
Bridgit Feeser, Assistant Director for Consumer Protection  
Jim Ward, Regulatory Analyst, Regulatory Services  
Ann LaRue, Accounting Policy Specialist, Regulatory Services  
John Cupp, Consumer Protection Staff

### **Recommendation**

Issue an order adopting the recommendations set forth in Appendix B, and direct Staff to conduct stakeholder workshops to implement the terms and conditions of Appendix B by August 31, 2021.

### **Discussion**

On April 17, 2020, Governor Inslee issued Proclamation 20-23.2, which prohibits all energy, water, and telecommunications providers from (1) disconnecting residential service due to nonpayment, (2) refusing to reconnect residential customers who were disconnected due to nonpayment, and (3) charging late fees or reconnection fees. The prohibition was set to expire on May 4, 2020, but subsequent proclamations have extended that date through July 31, 2021. Proclamation 20-23.4, issued on May 29, 2020, also required utilities to develop COVID-19 Customer Support Programs consistent with state guidance from the Governor's office to address payment plan options for residential customers who are in arrears due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (Commission or UTC) formed a COVID-19 response workgroup of energy stakeholders to facilitate development of a term sheet with guidelines for ensuring that customers experiencing economic hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic maintain access to essential services after Proclamation 20-23 expires and the moratorium on disconnections and late fees is no longer in effect.

On May 18, 2021, the Commission entered Order 03 in Docket U-200281, which adopted the Third Revised Term Sheet as Appendix A. Appendix A focused on regulated electric and gas companies. **DOCKET U-200281 PAGE 2**

Recognizing a need for similar guidance for regulated water companies, Commission Staff (Staff) developed the *UTC Staff Water Utility Options COVID-19 Recovery*, attached hereto, and referred to as Appendix B. This proposed term sheet requests regulated water companies to provide feedback regarding Appendix B at the July 8 open meeting or file written comments by **5 p.m., July 7, 2021.**

The Commission seeks comments on the proposed term sheet (Appendix B), specifically,

- Do regulated water companies support Staff's recommendations outlined in Appendix B?
- Is there any part of Appendix B companies do not support, and why?

### **Conclusion**

It is in the public interest to implement guidelines and conditions for water utility disconnections to ensure customers that may be adversely affected by the current pandemic are availed of all possible remedies and assistance. It is a benefit to companies to receive past due amounts as opposed to writing off these accounts as uncollectible, where they may not receive any of the revenue owed for services. The Commission should provide guidance to regulated companies by adopting Staff's proposed Appendix B.

### **Recommendation**

Issue an order adopting the recommendations set forth in Appendix B, and direct Staff to conduct stakeholder workshops to implement the terms and conditions of Appendix B by August 31, 2021.