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State Of WASH.
UTIL. AND TRANSP.
COMMISSION

**Front and Centered
to Commission Notice of Opportunity to File Written Comments
Docket U-180907
January 17, 2019**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Adequacy of the Current Regulatory Framework Employed by the Commission in Addressing Developing Industry Trends, New Technologies, and Public Policy Affecting the Utility Sector Docket U-180907.

Front and Centered is a coalition of more than sixty organizations rooted in communities of color working together for climate, environmental, and energy justice in Washington State. Our Steering Committee includes some of the largest social justice organizations in the state. We are guided by a set of core principles that we are pleased to share, and which relate closely to your inquiry into the regulatory framework of the Commission. Those Principles include:

Structural Equity Analysis Should Drive Decisions

The current regulatory and policy framework of the commission (nor any other regulatory body) is not neutral on issues of income, wealth, race, and language, and other social determinants of well-being because they are embedded in a larger social and economic context, both historic and ongoing, that advantages some groups over others, resulting in present day inequities. Achieving just and fair policy and regulatory outcomes requires accounting for past policies and decisions that create persistent inequity and disproportionality. This begins with gathering data that may reveal structural inequities and using that data in decision-making.

Build-in Consultation with Communities Disproportionately Impacted

The impact of a regulatory framework is a factor of both who is directly affected and the vulnerability or resilience of those affected against those effects. Those most impacted are in an ideal position to help shape regulatory frameworks and policy. Avoiding impacts and channeling benefits to those most impacted can create universal benefits for all stakeholders. The Commission should include those most impacted in the decision-making process and in the ongoing and monitoring and evaluation of regulation. Procedural equity should be a core principle.

Use Targeted Strategies to Achieve Universal Standards

The Commission should set universal targets for the economic, social, and health goals and metrics in its regulatory regime (such as no ratepayer above a certain percentage energy burden), identify which segments of society are not achieving those goals and the barriers (geography, renter, language spoken at home, etc.), and require targeted strategies to ensure all Washington

residents are benefiting from Washington's regulated utilities. This contrasts with a more typical universal approach that assumes treating all customers the same will create equal outcomes. Distributional equity recognizes that the most impacted populations and communities (a factor of both proximity to concern and vulnerability) need targeted support to overcome greater barriers and achieve fair and just treatment.

Front and Centered believes the Commission's duty to achieve fair, just, reasonable and sufficient rates and the public interest requires attention to the principles cited here. In addition, we believe the Commission must be attentive to the utilities' critical role in the public's interests in the economy, environment, and society in areas that are not being considered in the current regulatory framework. For example, the Commission has been very attentive to minimizing economic risk and cost to ratepayers but spent less attention on the economic opportunities, such as job creation, quantity, and distribution, wealth building through ownership of distributed energy assets, or the downstream economic effects of shut-offs. The Commission should regulate not only for the risk of greenhouse gas pollution, but local environmental health impacts, like air pollution and toxic and hazardous substances, the danger of flammable fuels, and resilience to natural disasters. The Commission should be attentive to both the short-term and the long-term benefits, costs, and risks in the of first, second, a third order impacts in which regulated utilities are determining factors. In doing so, the Commission may find and improve integration of energy conservation, distributed energy resources, and distributed ownership as important values, areas where we see great opportunity to serve public interest.

The regulatory and policy regime should emphasize performance against this wider range of public interests. For example, judging utilities on performance plans against the number of households receiving appropriate energy assistance. Performance regulation that accounts for equity and the public interest, broadly understood, can ensure a more rapid shift toward desirable outcomes. We welcome the Commission's interest in pursuing an effective regulatory regime which maximizes the broad public interests' utilities affect.

Thank you for your consideration, for any questions please contact Deric Gruen, Program Director at 206-422-2597 or deric@frontandcentered.org. Visit our website at FrontandCentered.org