Service Date: January 15, 2026

BEFORE THE WASHINGTON
UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

In the Matter of the Investigation of LION MOVERS LLC, For Compliance with WAC 480-15-560	DOCKET TV-250137 ORDER 02 ORDER DENYING LION MOVERS LLC's REQUEST FOR FURTHER PENALTY MITIGATION

BACKGROUND

1 Lion Movers LLC (Lion Movers or Company) is a Washington company engaging in business as a household goods carrier. The Company currently holds Commission-issued provisional permit number THG-070121 and USDOT Number 3668237. Under its provisional authority, it has traveled over 9,000 miles.

2 On January 25, 2022, the Company began operations under a provisional permit of authority as an intrastate household goods carrier.

3 On July 9, 2024, Commission staff (Staff) conducted a routine safety investigation of the Company's compliance with chapter 480-15 Washington Administrative Code (WAC).[1]

4 On August 2, 2024, in Docket TV-240549, Staff filed a Penalty Assessment requesting to impose $300 in penalties against the Company for the following violations:

> One violation of WAC 480-15-555(1) for failure to complete a nationwide criminal background check for every person the carrier intends to hire;
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> Twenty-six violations of 49 C.F.R. § 395.8(a)(1) for failure to require a driver to prepare a record of duty status using the appropriate method;

[1] *In re Investigation of Lion Movers LLC*, Docket TV-240549, Notice of Intent to Cancel at ¶ 4 (August 5, 2024).

> One violation of 49 C.F.R. § 396.3(a)(1) for brakes: defective brake(s) are equal to or greater than 20 percent of the service brakes on the vehicle.[2]

5 On August 5, 2024, in Docket TV-240549, Staff filed a Notice of Intent to Cancel notifying the Company that its temporary authority to operate would be cancelled if it did not obtain a Commission approved Safety Management Plan (SMP), and set the matter to be heard in a brief adjudicative proceeding (BAP) on September 12, 2024.[3]

6 On September 9, 2024, Staff received a SMP from the Company, and on September 11, 2024, Staff filed an Evaluation of Safety Management Plan, in which Staff concluded that the Company had "taken corrective action to develop a compliant safety program and implemented systems that if followed, should prevent future repeat violations."[4] Further, Staff found that the Company's SMP met the legal requirements of 49 C.F.R. § 385 and requested, among other things, that the Commission cancel the BAP scheduled for September 12, 2024.[5]

7 On September 17, 2024, the Commission entered Order 01 (Order 01) Approving Safety Management Plan; Extending Conditional Status; With Conditions in Docket TV-240549. As part of Order 01, the Commission extended the Company's provisional permit under a conditional safety rating until the Company achieved a satisfactory safety rating or until the Commission found good cause to cancel the Company's operating authority.[6] The Commission conditioned the extension of the Company's provisional permit on a follow up safety inspection at least six months after entry of Order 01, and upon the Company not incurring any repeat violations of critical[7] regulations upon

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[2] *In re Investigation of Lion Movers LLC*, Docket TV-240549, Notice of Penalties Incurred at ¶ 1-2 (August 2, 2024).

[3] *In re Investigation of Lion Movers LLC*, Docket TV-240549, Notice of Intent to Cancel at ¶ 7 (August 5, 2024).

[4] *In re Investigation of Lion Movers LLC*, Docket TV-240549, Evaluation of Safety Management Plan at ¶ 10 (September 11, 2024).

[5] *In re Investigation of Lion Movers LLC*, Docket TV-240549, Evaluation of Safety Management Plan at ¶ 10 (September 11, 2024).

[6] *In re Investigation of Lion Movers LLC*, Docket TV-240549, Order 01 at ¶ 30 (September 17, 2024).

[7] "Critical" regulations are those identified as such where non-compliance relates to management and operational controls. These are indicative of breakdowns in a company's management controls. Patterns of non-compliance with a critical regulation are linked to inadequate safety management controls and higher than average accident rates. 49 C.F.R. § 385, Appendix B.II.c, e.

reinspection.[8] Further, the Commission assessed a penalty of $300 on the Company, which the Company promptly paid on September 24, 2024.[9]

8 In March 2025, Staff completed a follow-up investigation after the Commission extended the Company's provisional operating authority in Docket TV-240549. As part of its March 2025 investigation, Staff found the following ten violations:

> One acute[10] violation of 49 C.F.R. § 390.35 for making or causing to make a fraudulent or intentionally false statement or record when the Company provided false, misleading, or inaccurate information following questioning of hours of service and national background check records;
>
> Nine critical violations of 49 C.F.R. § 395.8(a)(1) for failing to require a driver to prepare a record of duty status using the appropriate method when the carrier failed to require the driver to make a record of duty status using the proper method. More specifically that no work time/administrative time was recorded and tracked for drivers on nine occasions.[11]

Because of the regulatory violations discovered by Staff, the Company received a proposed conditional safety rating.[12]

9 The Commission permitted the Company to submit an SMP describing the corrective actions it had taken. The investigation report provided detailed information to the Company on the steps necessary to prepare and submit the SMP. Although the Company submitted three SMP drafts to the Commission, Staff found that the drafts were deficient and did not accept them.[13]

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[8] *In re Investigation of Lion Movers LLC*, Docket TV-240549, Order 01 at ¶ 30 (September 17, 2024).

[9] *In re Investigation of Lion Movers LLC*, Docket TV-240549, Order 01 at ¶ 31 (September 17, 2024); *In re Investigation of Lion Movers LLC*, Docket TV-240549, Statement of Accounting (September 27, 2024).

[10] 49 C.F.R. § 385, Appendix B.II.b. (stating that "Acute" regulations are those identified as a violation of a regulation where "noncompliance is so severe as to require immediate corrective actions by a motor carrier regardless of the overall safety posture of the motor carrier.").

[11] *In re Investigation of Lion Movers LLC*, Docket TV-250137, Investigation Report at 3 (March 3, 2025).

[12] *In re Investigation of Lion Movers LLC*, Docket TV-250137, Notice of Intent to Cancel at ¶ 5 (March 31, 2025).

[13] Sharp, TR at 42:4-7.

10 On March 31, 2025, the Commission issued a Notice of Intent to Cancel, Complaint for Penalties, Notice of Brief Adjudicative Proceeding; Setting Time for Oral Statements, which set a second BAP (Second BAP) for April 25, 2025.

11 On April 25, 2025, the Commission convened a Second BAP before Administrative Law Judge Jessica Kruszewski. The Company owner, Almaz Nurmanbetov, appeared at the hearing representing the Company, and Staff appeared, represented by Assistant Attorney General Colin O'Brien.

12 Staff recommended that the Commission cancel the Company's permit and authority to operate as a household goods carrier.[14] Staff also recommended that the Commission impose a $1,000 penalty on the Company for each violation discovered during the March 2025 compliance review inspection, for a total penalty of $10,000.[15]

13 During the 2025 Second BAP, Staff testified that Mr. Nurmanbetov provided false or misleading statements in response to Staff's questions about hours of service and national background checks, which Staff identified as a pattern from the investigation in Docket TV-240549.[16] Staff further testified that the Company failed to require a driver to prepare a record of duty status, using the appropriate method.[17] Staff maintained that the Company did not accurately report administrative time for employees.[18]

14 Staff also stated that when Staff inquired into why the Company failed to log administrative time, Mr. Nurmanbetov explained that administrative time was not logged because he hired an individual from Ukraine named Hussein Abbas as the scheduling and customer contact for the Company.[19] Mr. Nurmanbetov informed Staff that because Mr. Abbas was a contractor and not employee, the Company had not run a background check on him.[20] However, in an email to Staff, Mr. Nurmanbetov stated: "All sales and

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[14] *In re Investigation of Lion Movers LLC*, Docket TV-250137, Notice of Intent to Cancel at ¶ 9 (March 31, 2025).

[15] *In re Investigation of Lion Movers LLC*, Docket TV-250137, Notice of Intent to Cancel at ¶ 9 (March 31, 2025).

[16] Cobile, TR at 16:3-5.

[17] Cobile, TR at 18:5-11.

[18] Cobile, TR at 18:9-11.

[19] Cobile, TR at 18:19 – 19:3.

[20] Cobile, TR at 19:18-19.

customer service I'm covering right now by myself."[21] In September 2024, Mr. Nurmenbetov provided a revised timesheet which showed 9 days of administrative time.[22]

15 Next, Staff testified that it looked at online reviews for Lion Movers and discovered at least ten employee names mentioned in the reviews, and more specifically, a review from a customer named Melissa H., who Mr. Nurmenbetov confirmed is a real customer, that listed three employees.[23] In response to Staff's inquiry about the 10 names listed in online reviews, Mr. Nurmenbetov informed Staff that he and his employee Rick De Wijs have several nicknames, and that he and Mr. De Wijs asked their friends and family members to create false online reviews for the Company.[24]

16 Staff recommended that the Commission cancel the Company's permit for the following reasons:

- After two safety investigations, the Company has yet to achieve a satisfactory safety rating despite receiving technical assistance and operating under an approved SMP.
- The Company has failed to submit an acceptable SMP for the March 2025 investigation.
- The Company has failed to meet each condition of Order 01 in Docket TV-240549, which extended the Company's provisional period under the condition that it does not incur any repeat critical violations upon reinspection.[25]
- The owner of the Company has a pattern of providing intentionally false, misleading, and inaccurate information to Staff.[26]

17 Staff recommended that the Commission impose a penalty of $10,000, or $1,000 per violation. Staff asserted that its penalty recommendation was reasonable because the Company has previously received technical assistance for failing to prepare a record of duty status and was working under an SMP.[27]

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[21] Cobile, Exh. TC-5 at 6.

[22] Cobile, TR at 25:1-4.

[23] Cobile, TR at 27:11-17.

[24] Cobile, TR at 27:15 – 28:3.

[25] Sharp, TR at 40:18-22 (*citing In re Investigation of Lion Movers LLC*, Docket TV-240549, Order 01 at ‖ 30 (September 17, 2024)).

[26] Sharp, TR at 40:23 – 41:3.

[27] Sharp, TR at 41:4-25.

18 During the 2025 BAP, the owner of the Company, Mr. Nurmanbetov, testified that if the Company's permit is cancelled it will be hard for him and that he cannot afford $10,000 in penalties.[28] Mr. Nurmanbetov expressed remorse and testified that he would like a chance to try his best to "meet all requirements for the UTC."[29] On cross examination, Mr. Nurmanbetov testified that during 2024, the Company had two employees, including himself.[30] In response to questioning regarding the Company's bills of lading[31] that show three employees, Mr. Nurmanbetov testified:

> On that situation, you know, during the sales we just, we just of course, we just try to sell our service as higher as we can, you know. So and probably it's kind of the maybe cause if you wanna if you wanna maybe add the price to our our service, you know. You will have to add one more worker on that on that price. So we may. Maybe that's why. But it's not means, you know, because we have some kind of the different rates for each particular job. And oh, you know so, for example, if we we can sell for for 1, 50 or 1, $100, $100 per hour. And for example, for other customers we can sell for. You know, 1, 60 or 1, 68 or something like that. So we will have to have to add those workers because our crm system working on that way. . . It's because of the price we'll have to add our worker. . . . [32]

19 Staff asked the following clarification questions of Mr. Nurmanbetov:

> Staff: Okay. So I just I wanna make sure that I'm clear on this. So you were putting down 3 movers. When there were only 2 people working on the job?
>
> Company: Yes.
>
> Staff: And you were doing that because that way you could charge more for the move?
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> Company: Yes.· But all of those prices . . . it's agreed with the customers.· It's not kind of the we are doing the, you know, during the move, we are trying to, you know, upcharge our customer. But it's . . . everything on the on the beginning of the project, you know, so.

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[28] Nurmanbetov, TR at 45:10-15.

[29] Nurmanbetov, TR at 46:9-12.

[30] Nurmanbetov, TR at 47:14-15.

[31] Cobile, Exh. TC-9.

[32] Nurmanbetov, TR at 47:19 – 48:14.

> Staff: So you're asserting the customers were aware that you were putting down more movers than were actually there, but you were doing it to get around the tariff rates that you were able to charge?
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> Company: Yes. [33]

20 At the conclusion of the hearing, each party provided a closing statement. Staff argued that its recommendations were based on the violations found during the March 2025 inspection, which provide a reasonable basis for the Commission to cancel Lion Mover's permit. Staff recommended that the Commission cancel the Company's permit and impose a penalty of $10,000. Mr. Nurmanbetov argued that he was sorry and that he tries to do his best to provide the best service to his customers.

21 On May 20, 2025, the Commission entered Order 01 (Order 01), Canceling Provisional Permit and Assessing Penalty, which, among other things, assessed a penalty of $5,500 against the Company after considering mitigating factors.

22 On August 5, 2025, the Company filed a Penalty Mitigation Request with a cover letter stating that the Company has "discontinued all regulated operations and ceased providing intrastate transportation services within Washington State."[34] Further, the Company requested the following:

> Due to the closure of the business and associated financial hardship, we respectfully request the Commission to consider reducing or waiving the penalty. As a small company, we do not have the resources to pay the full penalty, especially now that the business has ceased operations.[35]

23 On August 11, 2025, Staff filed a Response to Lion Movers LLC's Request for Mitigation asking the Commission to find the Company's request to be meritless because the penalty had already been mitigated and deny the Company's request for penalty mitigation.[36]

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[33] Nurmanbetov, TR at 48:23-25, 49:1-17.

[34] Request for Penalty Mitigation Cover Letter at 1.

[35] Request for Penalty Mitigation Cover Letter at 1.

[36] Staff's Response to Request for Penalty Mitigation at 1 ⁋ 1.

DISCUSSION

24 Pursuant to WAC 480-07-370(3), parties may file a petition to seek relief from the Commission.[37] Order 01 considers a number of factors in the discussion of penalties, and included factors for penalty mitigation.[38] Specifically, Order 01 discusses the following:

> After considering all evidence in the record in light of the above referenced penalty factors, we find that some mitigation is warranted given the size of the Company and the fact that the provisional permit is being cancelled, which will reduce the chance of continued violations.[39]

The Company has based its request for penalty mitigation on the closure of its moving business and associated financial hardship. However, closure of the business was expressly contemplated by Order 01 as a mitigating factor, and any associated financial hardship related to the closure of business was implicitly considered.[40] Because these factors were already considered when Order 01 mitigated penalties from the penalty recommendation from Staff, further penalty mitigation in this matter is not appropriate.

25 Staff raises concern that, because the Commission already mitigated penalties from $10,000 down to $5,500, and required the Company to cease intrastate operations, the Company would essentially be receiving double credit, which the Commission attempts to avoid.[41] We agree with Staff that reducing or waiving the penalty because the Company has ceased moving company operations would essentially provide double mitigation to the Company. As such, the Commission denies the Company's request for further mitigation or waiving of the penalty imposed by Order 01.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

26 (1) The Commission is an agency of the State of Washington, vested by statute with authority to regulate rates, rules, regulations, practices, and accounts of public service companies, including common carriers such as household goods carriers, and has jurisdiction over the parties and subject matter of this proceeding.

27 (2) Lion Movers LLC is a household goods carrier subject to Commission regulation.

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[37] WAC 480-07-370(3).

[38] Order 01 at 11-12 ¶¶ 33-36.

[39] Order 01 at 12 ¶ 36.

[40] Order 01 at 12 ¶ 36.

[41] Staff's Response to Request for Penalty Mitigation at 2 ¶ 3.

28 (3) We find that Lion Movers LLC has asked the Commission to consider the fact that it has closed its moving business and associated financial hardship in a request for further penalty mitigation. The Commission has already considered these factors explicitly and implicitly in Order 01 in penalty mitigation, so no further mitigation of penalty is warranted in this matter.

ORDER

THE COMMISSION ORDERS:

29 (1) The request by Lion Movers LLC for a reduced penalty and penalty waiver filed August 5, 2025, in Docket TV-250137 is DENIED.

DATED at Lacey, Washington, and effective January 15, 2026.

WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

/s/ *Jessica Kruszewski*
Jessica Kruszewski
Administrative Law Judge

NOTICE TO PARTIES

This is an Initial Order. The action proposed in this Initial Order is not yet effective, but will become effective by operation of law within 21 days of the Commission issuing this Order unless administrative review is sought or initiated by the Commission. If you disagree with this Initial Order and want the Commission to consider your comments, you must take specific action within the time limits outlined below. If you agree with this Initial Order, and you would like the Order to become final before the time limits expire, you may send a letter to the Commission, waiving your right to petition for administrative review.

WAC 480-07-610(7) provides that any party to this proceeding has twenty-one (21) days after the entry of this Initial Order to file a *Petition for Review*. What must be included in any Petition and other requirements for a Petition are stated in WAC 480-07-610(7)(b). WAC 480-07-610(7)(c) states that any party may file a *Response* to a Petition for review within seven (7) days after service of the Petition.

WAC 480-07-830 provides that before entry of a Final Order any party may file a Petition to Reopen a contested proceeding to permit receipt of evidence essential to a decision, but unavailable and not reasonably discoverable at the time of hearing, or for other good and sufficient cause. No Answer to a Petition to Reopen will be accepted for filing absent express notice by the Commission calling for such answer.

RCW 80.01.060(3) provides that an Initial Order will become final without further Commission action if no party seeks administrative review of the Initial Order and if the Commission fails to exercise administrative review on its own motion.

Any Petition or Response must be electronically filed through the Commission's web portal as required by WAC 480-07-140(5). Any Petition or Response filed must also be electronically served on each party of record as required by WAC 480-07-140(1)(b).