

**BEFORE THE WASHINGTON STATE UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION
COMMISSION**

WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND
TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION,

Complainant,

v.

PUGET SOUND ENERGY, INC.,

Respondent.

DOCKET NO. UE-090704

and

DOCKET NO. UG-090705
(consolidated)

NW ENERGY COALITION'S
COMMENTS IN SUPPORT OF
PUBLIC COUNSEL OBJECTION TO
PSE CUSTOMER NOTICE

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The NW Energy Coalition (Coalition) files these comments in support of Public Counsel's August 25, 2009, Objection to Puget Sound Energy's (PSE) proposed customer notice in this case. The Coalition was not a party in the negotiations with PSE, Public Counsel, and Commission Consumer Protection and Communications staff with regard to this notice. But we have long advocated for facilitating public involvement in Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (WUTC) processes and other regulatory proceedings throughout the Pacific Northwest. For the record, we express our concern that an effective process to solicit customer input – the customer comment card – has apparently been discarded in this case in favor of an approach that will likely result in significantly fewer public comments.

II. DISCUSSION

2. From the average ratepayer's perspective, utility regulatory proceedings tend to be esoteric, adjudicative in nature and challenging to understand and follow. Yet the decisions that arise from those proceedings have a significant effect on ratepayers. Facilitating public participation in the regulatory process is critical to ensure affected persons have an opportunity to be heard.

3. Providing a wide variety of methods for public participation will yield the greatest response. A web portal or email may be useful to some individuals, while others may prefer to testify at a public hearing, write a letter or make a phone call. The comment card at issue here is a simple, easy and straightforward method for encouraging public participation. Comment cards, a commonly used method for soliciting input, are used in various forums to measure customer satisfaction (e.g., in hotels and restaurants), tally pro or con positions on proposed laws, and advocate for adoption of specific policies. They require little effort on the part of the individual while providing an opportunity for opinions to be heard. Lack of time, knowledge and resources are significant barriers to public participation. Comment cards can help overcome those barriers.

4. We recognize that decisions in a utility rate case are not based on popular vote. Yet it is important to recognize the impacts of those decisions on individual ratepayers – to put a face on the affected individuals. When the board of a public utility such as a PUD or municipality makes a decision, its members know they must listen to their ratepayers because, ultimately, those are the individuals who determine whether or not they will remain in office. The Commission does not have that direct link to the public, but is

charged with regulating the practices of investor-owned utilities in the public interest. Regulating in the public interest includes facilitating public input.

III. CONCLUSION

5. For the aforementioned reasons, we support Public Counsel's objection to PSE's customer notice in this case. We echo Public Counsel's suggestion to pursue a rulemaking regarding customer notice issues to provide clarification and guidance to the utilities and other stakeholders. Consistent rules would avoid an ad hoc approach to developing customer notice, ultimately reducing confusion for ratepayers.

Dated August 27, 2009.

Respectfully submitted,

NW Energy Coalition

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Danielle Dixon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent than the last.

Danielle Dixon, Senior Policy Associate
David S. Johnson, Attorney