

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC UTILITIES



Inquiry of the Department of Public Utilities)
into Establishing Policies and Practices for)
Electric and Gas Companies Regarding Customer)
Assistance and Ratemaking Measures in)
Connection to the State of Emergency)
Regarding the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19))
Pandemic.)
_____)

D.P.U. 20-58

**JOINT MOTION TO EXTEND SMALL COMMERCIAL ARREARAGE
FORGIVENESS PROGRAM**

Fitchburg Gas and Electric Light Company d/b/a Unitil (“Unitil”), Massachusetts Electric Company and Nantucket Electric Company, Boston Gas Company and former Colonial Gas Company, each d/b/a National Grid (“National Grid”), and NSTAR Gas Company, NSTAR Electric Company, and Eversource Gas Company of Massachusetts¹ each d/b/a Eversource Energy (“Eversource”), and Liberty Utilities (New England Natural Gas Company) Corp. d/b/a Liberty (“Liberty”),² (together, the “Distribution Companies”) pursuant to 220 C.M.R. 1.02(5) and 220 C.M.R. 1.04(5) hereby request the Small Commercial Arrearage Forgiveness Program (“AFP”) be extended through April 1, 2021.

I. BACKGROUND

On May 11, 2020, the Department of Public Utilities (“Department”) issued a Notice of Inquiry into establishing policies and practices for electric and gas companies regarding customer

¹ On October 7, 2020, the Department of Public Utilities approved the asset purchase of CMA. Joint Petition of Eversource Energy, NiSource Inc., Eversource Gas Company of Massachusetts and CMA, D.P.U. 20-59 (2020). CMA is now Eversource Gas of Massachusetts.

² The Berkshire Gas Company’s Small Commercial AFP is already available through March 31, 2021. D.P.U. 20-58, Berkshire Gas Company Small Commercial AFP at 1 (Stamp Approved Oct. 15, 2020).

assistance and ratemaking measures in connection to the State of Emergency regarding the novel Coronavirus (“COVID-19”) Pandemic (“NOI”). The NOI directed the Working Group³ to create a Customer Assistance Report followed by a consensus ratemaking proposal to support customer assistance initiatives and to maintain the financial integrity of the utilities in response to COVID-19. The Working Group submitted the Customer Assistance report on May 29, 2020.

On August 12, 2020, the Distribution Companies submitted a *pro forma* Small Commercial AFP. On September 3, 2020, the Department issued D.P.U. 20-58-C approving the Working Group’s proposed Small Commercial AFP. On October 15, 2020, the Department stamp approved the Distribution Companies’ individual compliance filings.

II. REQUEST FOR SMALL COMMERCIAL AFP EXTENSION

Small Commercial customers are some of the most impacted by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. As such, the Small Commercial AFP was designed to assist customers with arrears that have accrued or increased during the Commonwealth of Massachusetts’ COVID-19 pandemic State of Emergency.

The Small Commercial AFP encourages small commercial customers to enroll in and successfully complete a payment plan, with a duration of up to 12 months. Since the Distribution Companies seek to encourage not only enrollment but completion of the payment plan, the Working Group established a two-credit structure. To incent the customer to enroll, the first credit is applied upon payment of the first required payment under the payment plan. To encourage completion of the payment plan, the second credit is applied once the customer makes the final

³ The Working Group is comprised of the Distribution Companies, the Office of the Attorney General (“AGO” or “Attorney General”), the Department of Energy Resources (“DOER”), the National Consumer Law Center (“NCLC”), the Low-Income Energy Affordability Network (“LEAN”) and the Associated Industries of Massachusetts (“AIM”) (together, the “Working Group”).

payment in the payment plan. The value of the first and second credits will equal the customer's April and May bill amount, respectively.

The Small Commercial AFP was proposed and approved to be offered through December 31, 2020 (D.P.U. 20-58-C Order at 3). Given the relatively compressed timeframe for offering the Small Commercial AFP, the Distribution Companies hereby request to extend the AFP to enroll additional customers during the winter months. Further, with the COVID-19 pandemic ongoing and infection rates rising, the Distribution Companies believe the Small Commercial AFP continues to be an important customer assistance tool. Therefore, the Distribution Companies request extending the Small Commercial AFP through April 1, 2021. Extending the Small Commercial AFP through April 1, 2021 will allow the Distribution Companies to continue providing meaningful assistance to Small Commercial customers throughout the upcoming months, as the pandemic continues.

To date, the Distribution Companies have enrolled 4,899 small commercial customers in the AFP.

Company	Number of Participants as of 12/2/2020
Eversource Energy	3,425
Liberty	7
National Grid	1,445
Unitil	22

III. CONCLUSION

Given the compressed timeframe for offering the Small Commercial AFP and the ongoing pandemic, the Distribution Companies respectfully request the Department allow the AFP to be extended through April 1, 2021. The Distribution Companies have shared this motion with the Working Group and are authorized to state the AGO, DOER, NCLC, and AIM⁴ do not object to the filing of this motion.

⁴ The Distribution Companies did not receive a response from LEAN.

Respectfully Submitted,

DISTRIBUTION COMPANIES

By their attorneys,

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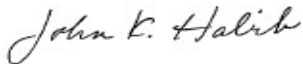
**LIBERTY UTILITIES (NEW
ENGLAND NATURAL GAS
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