

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS  
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC UTILITIES



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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 Unutil (“Unutil”), 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 Massachusetts<sup>1</sup> each d/b/a Eversource Energy (“Eversource”), Liberty Utilities (New England Natural Gas Company) Corp. d/b/a Liberty (“Liberty”), and the Berkshire Gas Company (“Berkshire”) (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 June 30, 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 assistance and ratemaking measures in connection to the State of Emergency regarding the novel

<sup>1</sup> 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.

Coronavirus (“COVID-19”) Pandemic (“NOI”). The NOI directed the Working Group<sup>2</sup> 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 July 31, 2020, the Department approved the Companies’ proposal to extend 12-month payment plan options for 90 days beyond the Shut-Off Moratorium.<sup>3</sup> D.P.U. 20-58-B at 13-14. On February 26, 2021, the Department Chair issued an Eighth Set of Orders directing the Distribution Companies to suspend shut-off activities for residential customers until July 1, 2021.<sup>4</sup>

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. On December 11, 2020, the Distribution Companies filed a Motion to Extend the Small Commercial AFP through April 1, 2021 and, on December 22, 2020, the Department stamp-approved the Motion to Extend.

## **II. REQUEST FOR SMALL COMMERCIAL AFP EXTENSION**

Small Commercial customers continue to be some of the most impacted by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. As such, the Small Commercial AFP was designed to assist customers with

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<sup>2</sup> 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”).

<sup>3</sup> On November 6, 2020, the Distribution Companies, AGO and NCLC supported extending the winter moratorium to April 1, 2021. D.P.U. 20-58, Fifth Update Report, at 3.

<sup>4</sup> Chair’s Eighth Set of Orders at 2 (Feb. 26, 2021).

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

With the extension, the Small Commercial AFP was approved to be offered through April 1, 2021 (D.P.U. 20-58, Motion to Extend Stamp Approved (Dec.12, 2020)). Given the ongoing pandemic and continued economic distress, the Distribution Companies hereby request to extend the AFP to enroll additional customers. Further, with the COVID-19 pandemic ongoing and many small businesses struggling financially, 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 June 30, 2021. Extending the Small Commercial AFP through June 30, 2021 will allow the Distribution Companies to continue providing meaningful assistance to Small Commercial customers throughout the upcoming months, as the pandemic continues.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

Given the ongoing pandemic, the Distribution Companies respectfully request the Department allow the Small Commercial AFP to be extended through June 30, 2021. The

Distribution Companies have shared this motion with the Working Group and are authorized to state the AGO, DOER, NCLC, and AIM<sup>5</sup> do not object to the filing of this motion.

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<sup>5</sup> The Distribution Companies did not receive a response from LEAN.

Respectfully Submitted,

**DISTRIBUTION COMPANIES**

By their attorneys,

**FITCHBURG GAS AND ELECTRIC  
LIGHT COMPANY d/b/a UNITIL**



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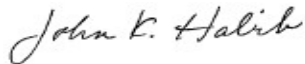
**LIBERTY UTILITIES (NEW  
ENGLAND NATURAL GAS  
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