

# Pennsylvania Telephone Association

"The Communications  
Leader in Pennsylvania"



June 15, 2020

Ms. Rosemary Chiavetta  
Secretary  
Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission  
P.O. Box 3265  
Harrisburg, PA 17105

Re: **M-2020-3020055**  
COVID-19 Customer Service, Billing, and Public Outreach Provisions  
Request for Utility Information  
- *North Penn Telephone Company*

Dear Secretary Chiavetta:

In response to the Secretarial Letter dated May 29, 2020 at the above docket, please find the replies from the company noted above.

Sincerely,

Steven J. Samara  
President

cc: Sarah Dewey (via email)  
Tom Charles (via email)



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION  
400 North Street, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17120

IN REPLY PLEASE  
REFER TO OUR FILE  
M-2020-3020055

May 29, 2020

**Re: COVID-19 Customer Service, Billing, and Public Outreach Provisions  
Request for Utility Information  
Docket No. M-2020-3020055**

To Whom It May Concern:

On March 6, 2020, Governor Tom Wolf issued a Proclamation of Disaster Emergency in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (*Emergency Proclamation*).<sup>1</sup> On March 13, 2020, Gladys Brown Dutrieuille, Chairman of the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (Commission), issued an *Emergency Order*. The *Emergency Order* prohibits jurisdictional utilities from terminating service during the pendency of the *Emergency Proclamation* unless termination of service is necessary to ameliorate a safety emergency or unless otherwise determined by the Commission. The *Emergency Order* also encourages utilities to reconnect previously terminated service if such action could be done safely. *Public Utility Service Termination Moratorium Proclamation of Disaster Emergency-COVID-19*, Docket No. M-2020-3019244 (*Emergency Order* ratified on March 26, 2020) (*Emergency Order*). The restrictions surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, including compliance with the *Emergency Proclamation*, and the *Emergency Order*, have affected the ways in which the utilities can interact with customers.

Accordingly, the Commission hereby directs the utilities to provide the following information to the PUC within 10 calendar days of the issuance of this Secretarial Letter.<sup>2</sup>

**I. COVID-19 Utility Consumer Service and Billing Policies and Procedures**

Describe and report efforts to support customers through initiatives in customer service and billing policies and procedures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing recovery period. Explain how these initiatives differ from normal operations:

North Penn Telephone had adopted the FCC and PUC policy to not terminate any services for the Duration of the Pandemic. We also started an initiative to connect any home in our serving area with students that had no internet access. These homes were

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.governor.pa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/20200306-COVID19-Digital-Proclamation.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Jurisdictional utilities have also been directed to track costs associated with COVID-19 and the *Emergency Proclamation* and the *Emergency Order* by Secretarial Letter dated May 13, 2020, at Docket No. M-2020-3019775.

connected without any connection fee or credit check and service was free through June to cover the students through the end of the Academic year.

### **Termination of Utility Service:**

- After the Commission’s Emergency Order on Terminations at Docket No. M-2020-3019244 ends, how soon does the utility plan to begin termination of service for nonpayment?

Suspension notices will be sent out on July 1 and calls will begin on July 20<sup>th</sup> to remind customers of their pending suspension.

- How does the utility plan to implement terminations and will it start the process with new termination notices?

Suspensions will be carried out on July 27<sup>th</sup> unless payment or payment arrangements have been made.

- Broken out by customer class, how many customer accounts may be subject to termination if the Commission’s Emergency Order prohibiting terminations is rescinded and how does this number compare to the same time period in 2019?

- Provide these figures for all utility confirmed low-income customers, including Lifeline and Customer Assistance Program (CAP) customers.

Residential customers 250.

Business customers 19.

Last year there were Residential Customers 75.

Business Customers 5.

- Provide future projections if available.

- Is the utility currently assessing a “reconnection fee” to restore service? If yes, how is the fee billed and/or collected? Will this fee apply to customers reconnected under the Commission’s Emergency Order that wish to pay any arrearage and stay connected?

If a customer is suspended a reconnection fee will be billed for the customer to be restored. We will wave this on a case by case basis if the customer is willing to work with us to get the payments caught up.

### **Universal Service Programs:**

- Is the utility currently removing customers from CAP for non-payment or failure to recertify?

We are not currently suspending these customers.

- What are the utility’s current Hardship Fund payment requirements to qualify low-income customers for grants (e.g., waiving payment history “good faith payment”, or CAP participation criteria) and have these requirements been revised due to the pandemic?

None are available at this time.

**Other Assistance Initiatives:**

- Describe any policies/procedures the utility has updated to assist customers impacted by the pandemic that go beyond provisions in PUC policies or regulations.

No charge for households with Students with no Internet in their homes for the duration of the Pandemic that we added Internet service for familys.

- Describe any proposed or anticipated changes in programs/practices/policies to assist customers impacted by the pandemic after the Governor’s Emergency Proclamation and the PUC Emergency Order on Terminations expire or are lifted.

Utilities are directed to report this information to Sarah Dewey, [sdewey@pa.gov](mailto:sdewey@pa.gov) in the Commission’s Bureau of Consumer Services (BCS), detailing the efforts already in place and thereafter when further changes by the utilities are implemented.

None that we are aware of at this time.

**II. Consumer Education and Outreach**

The Commission is specifically interested in how utilities are informing customers of their rights and responsibilities as ratepayers during the COVID-19 pandemic and in determining whether any gaps exist in consumer education and outreach efforts. The Commission directs all jurisdictional electric, natural gas, water, wastewater, and telecommunications utilities to submit to Tom Charles, [thcharles@pa.gov](mailto:thcharles@pa.gov), in the Commission’s Office of Communications, the following information, if applicable, regarding consumer education and outreach strategies related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing recovery period.

- Descriptions and/or examples of how the utilities are educating their customers about their rights and responsibilities, assistance programs, energy efficiency and conservation, and/or COVID-19 recovery.

Rights for residential customers are on their bills and Social Media initiatives are on going.

- Efforts to reach all utility consumers with information about income-qualified programs and resources and about non-income-qualified educational services, tools, and resources.  
Standard practices.
- Methods that utilities are using to make their customers aware of important proceedings that may include telephonic public input hearings and allowing consumers to be able to make their voices heard.  
Standard practices.
- Description of utility outreach methods that could be used to inform eligible Pennsylvanians about changes related to COVID-19 in the Lifeline Program for Telephone and Broadband Internet Service.  
Bill Messaging and Social Media.

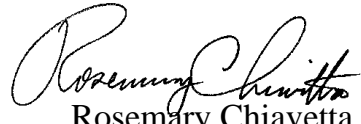
If programs have been modified due to the pandemic, please provide current customer education tools and advertising so that the Commission's own customer education efforts are based on current utility programs and practices.

We have not changed anything at this time.

This Secretarial Letter shall be served upon all electric, natural gas, water, wastewater, and telecommunications utilities under the Commission's jurisdiction. All jurisdictional electric, natural gas, water, wastewater, and telecommunications utilities are directed to provide the requested information within 10 calendar days of the issuance of this Secretarial Letter. All responses to the Secretarial Letter should be directed to the Secretary and made by efilng through the Commission's efilng system noting the docket number. If your response contains confidential or proprietary information, you may email your filing directly to Secretary Chiavetta at [rchiavetta@pa.gov](mailto:rchiavetta@pa.gov). As directed, responses pertaining to certain data requests should also be sent to Sarah Dewey of the Bureau of Consumer Services and Tom Charles, Director of Communications, respectively.

If you have any questions in this matter, please contact Renardo L. Hicks, Chief Counsel, at [rehicks@pa.gov](mailto:rehicks@pa.gov), or John Herzog, Executive Deputy Chief Counsel, at [jherzog@pa.gov](mailto:jherzog@pa.gov).

Sincerely

  
Rosemary Chiavetta  
Secretary

cc: Seth Mendelsohn, PUC Executive Director  
Renardo L. Hicks, Chief Counsel  
John Herzog, Executive Deputy Chief Counsel  
Alexis Bechtel, Director, Bureau of Consumer Services  
Tom Charles, Director, Office of Communications  
Lori Mohr, Bureau of Consumer Services  
Louise Fink Smith, Law Bureau  
Office of Consumer Advocate  
Office of Small Business Advocate  
Bureau of Investigation and Enforcement