

COVID-19 Customer Service, Billing, and Public Outreach Provisions Data Request

Docket No. M-2020-3020055

Consolidated Communications of Pennsylvania Company, LLC's ("Consolidated") Response to Data Requests

Data Request:

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:

Response:

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Consolidated Communications had made a student offer available, offering two months free internet service to new customers with students at home to support online learning. In addition to following state disconnection orders, Consolidated has also worked with its customers through the FCC's Keep America Connected pledge to ensure customers that called in indicating they were having trouble paying as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic did not have any services disconnected. Finally, Consolidated has worked with its customers on payment plans in order to ensure that customers are paying what they are able to avoid a large bill at the end of the crisis that they may not otherwise be able to pay down. Consolidated has been performing outbound calling and placing bill messages on customer bills for those customers that have past due balances in order to encourage the customers to call in. When customers are calling in, Consolidated's collections representatives are working to get customers to enter into payment plans and begin making payments to avoid their bills getting too high.

Data Request:

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

Response:

Following the Commission's Emergency Order termination, the utility will very quickly begin the collections process and issuing termination letters. Consolidated will offer extended payment plans to allow customers to get current and avoid disconnection since it is in neither the utility or the customer's best interest that large numbers of customers are disconnected. Consolidated will make every effort to ensure customers are given the opportunity to pay what they can afford in order to get current on their bills.

Data Request:

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.

Response:

Currently there are approximately 150 consumer customers and 22 business customers eligible for suspension. Consolidated does not have the number of lifeline customers eligible for suspension.

Data Request:

Provide future projections if available.

Response:

Consolidated is unable to provide future projections with regards to the number of customers that will be subject to disconnection because the numbers have varied widely week to week.

Data Request:

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?

Response:

Consolidated charges a \$10 fee for reconnection of service following suspension of service except in the Marianna Scenery Hill and Bentleyville exchanges where Consolidated charges a \$30 reconnection fee. This fee is placed on a customer's monthly bill and is paid in the normal course with all charges on the bill. This fee is only charged to customers that are actually

disconnected, so to the extent the customer pay an arrearage or agrees to a payment plan, the customer will not be disconnected and charged. The fee will be charged to customers who receive a disconnection notice and do not call in to pay or make payment arrangements.

Data Request:

Universal Service Programs:

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

Response:

Consolidated Communications will enter into payment arrangements, but does not waive charges for low income customers. Consolidated Communications is offering extended payment arrangements due to the Pandemic.

Data Request:

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.

Response:

Except for updates to safety protocols for engaging with customers, Consolidated has not currently updated any policies or procedures that go beyond provisions in the PUC policies or regulations.

Data Request:

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.

Response:

Consolidated does not currently anticipate any changes in programs, practices or policies following the PUC Emergency Order on terminations.

Data Request:

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.

Response:

Consolidated does not have COVID-19 related examples of outreach, however Consolidated does provide annual notices regarding Lifeline offerings.

Data Request:

Efforts to reach all utility consumers with information about income-qualified programs and resources and about non-income-qualified educational services, tools, and resources.

Response:

See response above.

Data Request:

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.

Response:

Consolidated has not had proceedings in which public input is required.

Data Request:

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.

Response:

Consolidated notifies its customers of changes through the use of bill messages.

I, Sarah A. Davis, hereby state that the facts above set forth are true and correct to the best of my knowledge, information and belief, and that I expect to be able to prove the same at a hearing held in this matter. I understand that the statements herein are made subject to the penalties of 18 Pa. C.S. § 4904 (relating to unsworn falsification to authorities).

Signature

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sarah A. Davis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and "D".

Title

Senior Director Government Affairs