

**BEFORE THE
PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF OHIO**

In the Matter of the Commission's)	
Investigation of Ohio's Retail Electric)	12-3151-EL-COI
Service Market)	

In the Matter of the Market)	
Development Working)	14-2074-EL-EDI
Group Staff Report.)	

COMMENTS OF DUKE ENERGY OHIO, INC.

I. INTRODUCTION

Duke Energy Ohio, Inc. (Duke Energy Ohio) is, and has been, an active participant in matters related to the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (Commission) inquiry into the status of the electric retail market in Ohio since its inception, beginning with the first round of comments in March of 2013. As a result of this inquiry, the Commission formed the Market Development Working Group (MDWG) and directed the MDWG to engage in collaborative discussions related to certain specified topics. Duke Energy Ohio likewise participated in the MDWG. Among the Commission's assignments to this group was the charge to develop an operational plan to implement, *inter alia*, a "warm transfer process." After development of the plan, the Commission directed the Staff of the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (Staff) to file a Staff Report incorporating the operational plan in a case with an EL-EDI designation.¹ The Staff filed its report (Report), on July 16, 2015. Duke

¹ *In the Matter of the Commission's Investigation of Ohio's Retail Electric Service Market*, Case No.12-3151-EL-COI, Finding and Order, (March 26, 2014) at p.25.

Energy Ohio offers the following comments for the Commission's consideration with respect to the Staff's Report.

I. COMMENTS

As an overarching observation, the Staff's Report goes significantly beyond the scope of what has been discussed to date during MDWG discussions. The discussions held during MDWG sessions involved ways in which customers could retain suppliers that they had selected, when such customers moved within an EDU service territory. The topic discussed in Staff's Report addresses ways in which a customer can elect to stay with a supplier. But the Staff Report recommends that the Commission consider a "warm transfer" as the best option to accomplish this result. Staff embellishes upon this recommendation by suggesting that this protocol would provide such benefits as "customer education regarding choice" and opines that this will only involve "incremental labor and telecommunication expense." Duke Energy Ohio does not agree that either of these assertions are valid or appropriate in the context of this discussion.

A. Warm Transfer Protocol

Under the proposed Operational Plan for Warm Transfer, Staff recommends that the EDU provide various options to the customer and explain customer choice. This essentially changes the EDU role to that of an advocate for choice. Throughout the first fifteen years of electric choice, EDUs have not been responsible for promoting choice, but rather have been charged with neutrality and with being responsive to customers' services. Now, it appears that EDUs are to staff accordingly in order to function as advocates for choice. This requirement is indeed very costly and very time consuming. It goes well beyond the simple retention of the customer's supplier at a new location and entails a much longer, more

detailed and informative discussion with the customer. Requirements such as these are costly due to the requirement to educate, monitor and maintain current information for call center representatives. EDU transfers should be “cold” as opposed to “warm”. No introduction should be required. Solutions to retaining existing suppliers will be unique to each EDU based on the technological capabilities required and contractual relationships pertaining. One size will not fit all and Staff’s recommendation fails to recognize these facts.

B. Third Party Resources

At present, Duke Energy Ohio uses contractors such as AllConnect or Bridgevine to manage customer moves. Thus, Duke Energy Ohio would expect to hand-off customers to these third parties to likewise manage the warm transfer protocol. These third parties provide additional services to customers upon request. CRES providers could contract with these third parties as needed to customize their services.

Also, transferring calls to CRES provider call centers eliminates the ability of the customer to receive the beneficial services provided by entities such as AllConnect or Bridgevine.

These third parties offer services of value to customers by coordinating applications for new water, sewer, telephone, cable TV, and satellite TV service, as well as offering any associated discounts. If a call is transferred directly to a CRES provider, the services of the third party are lost.

Duke Energy Ohio, as a regulated utility, complies with Commission regulations and is appropriately audited by the Commission on an annual basis. Response times to customers are tracked and audited. Not so for a CRES provider. If a customer is handed off to a CRES provider and receives less than optimal service, there is no regulation to protect the customer.

CRES provider call centers may not be sufficiently staffed to appropriately manage the increased call volume. Hold times and busy signals cannot be managed. In addition, Duke Energy Ohio has controls in place to manage dropped calls between our call centers and our contracted third parties, and these third parties provide for more detailed discussions to allow a customer to work through their options. For these reasons, Duke Energy Ohio urges the Commission to consider a transfer to a third party to manage the protocol, instead of a transfer directly to a CRES provider.

C. Governmental Aggregation

EDUs do not know whether or not a particular account is within a given governmental aggregation. Verifying governmental aggregation boundaries has always been the responsibility of a CRES provider. An EDU can verify that a current customer account is enrolled in a governmental aggregation by the current CRES provider. Thus, an EDU cannot transfer the customer to a governmental aggregator when a customer requests to enroll within the governmental aggregation at their new location. This recommendation is therefore unworkable under current systems.


Finally, Staff has included a Table as Appendix B attached to its Report. This Table purports to show costs and benefits of various options and respective ease of implementation. Duke Energy Ohio's costs may or may not match with the numbers in Appendix B. Since the Company has not undertaken a detailed study of such programmatic changes, costs are uncertain.

II. CONCLUSION

For the reasons stated, Duke Energy Ohio respectfully request that the Commission not direct EDUs to be required to implement a "one size fits all" solution. The Commission

should provide flexibility and instead allow each EDU to implement its best option to achieve the goal of allowing a customer to stay with its existing CRES provider contract.

Respectfully submitted,
DUKE ENERGY OHIO, INC.



Amy B. Spiller
Deputy General Counsel
Elizabeth H. Watts
Associate General Counsel
Duke Energy Business Services LLC
139 East Fourth Street
1303-Main
Cincinnati Ohio 45202
513-287-4359 (telephone)
513-287-4385 (facsimile)
amy.spiller@duke-energy.com (e-mail)
elizabeth.watts@duke-energy.com

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that the Comments of Duke Energy Ohio, Inc. was filed electronically through the Docketing Information System of the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio on this 6th day January 2016. The PUCO's e-filing system will electronically serve notice of the filing of this document to all parties of service.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Elizabeth H. Watts" followed by a stylized flourish.

Elizabeth H. Watts

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Case No(s). 12-3151-EL-COI, 14-2074-EL-EDI

Summary: Comments Comments of Duke Energy Ohio, Inc. electronically filed by Dianne Kuhnell on behalf of Duke Energy Ohio, Inc. and Spiller, Amy B. and Watts, Elizabeth H.