

**BEFORE
THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF OHIO**

In the Matter of the Application of Duke)
Energy Ohio, Inc for Approval of its)
Temporary Plan and Waiver of Tariffs and) Case No. 20-599-GE-UNC
Rules Related to the COVID-19 State of)
Emergency.)

TRANSITION PLAN OF DUKE ENERGY OHIO, INC.

Comes now Duke Energy Ohio, Inc. (Duke Energy Ohio or Company), pursuant to the directives of the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (Commission) in its June 17, 2020 Finding and Order (June 17th Order) in the above-styled proceeding (Waiver Case)¹ and hereby files this Comprehensive Transition Plan (Plan) to resume activities and operations previously suspended as a result of the Commission’s Case No. 20-591-AU-UNC (Emergency Case), in furtherance of a safe return to pre-COVID-19 operations, and relative to Duke Energy Ohio’s rule suspensions filed on March 19, 2020, in the Waiver Case. In support of its Plan, Duke Energy Ohio states the following:

1. Duke Energy Ohio is a “public utility” as defined by Sections 4905.02 and 4905.03, Revised Code (R.C.), an “electric light company,” as defined by R.C. 4905.03(C), and an “electric distribution company,” “electric supplier,” and “electric utility,” as defined by R.C. 4928.01, and a “natural gas company” within the meaning of R.C. 4905.03(E), and, as such, is subject to the jurisdiction of the Commission.

2. On March 12, 2020, the Commission initiated the Emergency Case and directed all utility companies in Ohio to review their disconnection procedures in light of the state of

¹ June 17th Order, p. 9.

emergency.² In the Emergency Case, the Commission issued an Entry on March 20, 2020, (March 20 Entry) further directing all utility companies to suspend in-person, actual meter readings in circumstances where a meter is located inside a customer's home or similar location, as well as all other non-essential functions that might create unnecessary COVID-19 risks associated with social contact, including, but not limited to, in-home energy audits, weatherization programs, in-premises inspections not prompted by an identified safety-related concern, and other similar initiatives.³

3. In its March 20 Entry, the Commission acknowledged that, during the state of emergency, no utility company was relieved of its statutory obligation to provide "necessary and adequate service and facilities under R.C. 4905.22."⁴ In connection with such continuing obligation, the Commission encouraged utility companies to adopt procedures intended to protect against the spread of COVID-19.

4. Duke Energy Ohio filed a Motion to Suspend Certain Requirements for the Duration of the State of Emergency Declared in Executive Order 2020-01D on March 19, 2020, (First Motion) and a Second Motion to Suspend Certain Limitations on Payment Plan Offerings in Ohio Administrative Code (O.A.C) Section 4901:1-18-05 on May 4, 2020 (Second Motion). The Company requested suspension of the rules listed therein related to disconnection and/or that might otherwise impose a service continuity hardship on customers or create unnecessary risks of social contact between Duke Energy Ohio personnel, customers, and the general public. Additionally, the Company requested that the Commission allow it to "offer residential customers additional

² *In re the Proper Procedures and Process for the Commission's Operations and Proceedings During the Declared State of Emergency and Related Matters*, Case No. 20-591-AU-UNC.

³ *Id.*, Entry, p. 1, and pp. 3-4 (March 20, 2020).

⁴ *See id.*, p. 4.

options for managing their utility bills.”⁵ The Company’s First and Second Motions were approved by the Commission’s June 17th Order.⁶

5. So as to fulfill its ongoing obligation to serve, Duke Energy Ohio adjusted the provision of safety-related and essential services to incorporate relevant health guidance and state-issued protocols. However, it has continued to perform all safety-related service work, including that in response to trouble calls. It has also continued to perform essential services, delaying only certain functions. The performance of both safety-related and essential services is outside the Commission’s directives and thus beyond the scope of the Company’s First and Second Motions. As such, the Company does not require any additional authorization in order to perform such services. But for avoidance of doubt, Duke Energy Ohio identifies here those safety-related and essential services that are being resumed as of June 26, 2020: a) necessary equipment replacements, upgrades, and exchanges; b) leak remediation/repairs; c) non-routine inspections; d) customer-requested investigations; e) service line work (*i.e.* repairs, replacements, renewals); f) designated building leak surveys (DBLS);⁷ g) natural gas distribution integrity management program work (DIMP), including but not limited to main replacements; and h) new service installations. In methodically resuming these safety-related and/or essential natural gas and electric utility services, the Company will adhere to the personal safety protocols further described below.

6. On April 27, 2020, Ohio Governor Mike DeWine announced a phased-in approach to restart Ohio’s economy, which had been suspended due to COVID-19 (RestartOhio). This

⁵ Second Motion of Duke Energy Ohio, Inc. to Suspend Certain Limitations on Payment Plan Offerings in Ohio Administrative Code Section 4901:1-18-05, p. 1 (May 4, 2020).

⁶ June 17th Order p. 9.

⁷ DBLS work resumed has been prioritized based upon customers, businesses, or schools that may still be closed and/or where it would be convenient to complete the survey prior to the customer or business fully re-opening.

phased-in approach began on May 1, 2020, with the health-care field and specific services that could commence within specified health protocols.⁸ The Restart Ohio plan has continued with key dates for the restarting of various types of businesses with necessary health protocols and operating requirements.⁹ Ohio's economy has already started transitioning back to regular business operations, with certain safety protocols in place to mitigate social contact risks. And Duke Energy Ohio must similarly resume all business operations, so that it may continue providing safe and reliable service to its customers consistent with existing regulations. Accordingly, with its June 17th Order, the Commission directed the Company to work with Staff to develop a comprehensive plan describing the Company's plan to safely resume activities to a pre-COVID-19 basis, including operations that will necessarily involve at least the potential for an expanded level of social contact.¹⁰

7. Recognizing its critical role in providing natural gas and electric service to approximately 700,000 electric customers and over 400,000 natural gas customers in southwest Ohio, Duke Energy Ohio has adopted appropriate personal safety protocols intended to mitigate the social spread of COVID-19 and continues to use such protocols today. Among other things, all Duke Energy Ohio employees and contractors who may interact with customers or engage in field work have access to necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) and maintain social distancing to the extent practicable. Materials and equipment such as tools and vehicles are cleaned regularly, as often as after each job. In instances where entry into a customer's premises is needed to perform an essential or safety-related service, Duke Energy Ohio personnel have been trained to complete a verbal screening, commonplace today, to elicit any COVID-related concerns

⁸See <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/resources/news-releases-news-you-can-use/governor-dewine-announces-details-ohios-responsible-restartohio-plan>

⁹ <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/responsible-restart-ohio/Responsible-Protocols/>

¹⁰ June 17th Order p. 9.

with entry. For work that must be scheduled, the Company contacts customers in advance to inform them of the nature of the work, and the safety protocols that will be used. Customers will have the right to refuse and reschedule the service at a later date unless an identified safety-concern exists that creates a hazard with a delay. These practices conform to all applicable guidelines issued by the Ohio Department of Health and the Governor's Office, including the Ohio Director of Public Health's April 30, 2020, Stay Safe Ohio Order, as amended by a subsequent order on May 20, 2020 (Stay Safe Order) and the Governor's Responsible RestartOhio protocols.¹¹

8. In addition to these functions integral to service continuity, Duke Energy Ohio has been proactively engaging with residential and non-residential customers who are accumulating arrearages on their utility bill to offer payment plans in an effort to mitigate future, more significant financial challenges. Additionally, the Company created an automated process via its website where residential and small/ medium customers can self-enroll in either a three- or six-month payment arrangement without having to contact the Company's call center.¹² In response to the Commission's June 17th Order, the Company will also offer reasonable optional payment plans to non-residential customers with minimum billing demand provisions, giving them options for up to six months to eliminate any accumulated arrearages. As the Company transitions back to implementing those activities and operations the Commission previously ordered suspended, it will continue offering flexible extended payment plans to customers, consistent with the Commission's prior directives and the Ohio Administrative Code.

9. The Company will also implement the following communication plan for its customers within 45 days of the filing of this Plan:

¹¹ <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/publicorders/Directors-Stay-Safe-Ohio-Order.pdf> (Accessed June 23, 2020); <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/publicorders/Stay-Safe-Partial-Rescission.pdf> (Accessed June 23, 2020).

¹² Large accounts are assigned to an account manager who can assist with payment arrangements.

- a. Commence written communications to customers with interior meters regarding the scheduling of required inspections and explain the safety precautions that the Company has implemented;
- b. Update its website notifying customers of implementation of the transition plan and key dates and milestones, especially those related to billing;
- c. Commence outreach to customer assistance agencies informing them of the transition plan;
- d. Commence an outbound call campaign to small/medium business customers regarding the implementation of the transition plan;
- e. Commence communications with managed customer large accounts regarding the implementation of the transition plan; and
- f. Commence communicating the transition plan key dates and milestones to customers via newsletters.

Given the dynamics of the current environment, Duke Energy Ohio reserves the right to revise its communications plan to incorporate information on additional payment/billing plans and programs it may offer.

10. Duke Energy Ohio now sets forth its Plan to continue and/or resume certain activities, including necessary work at a customer's premises. All such activities will be performed in accordance with health and safety-related protocols, including the use of PPE, tool sanitization, and adequate social distancing described above to the greatest extent possible. Additionally, in order to protect customers and employees, the Company has implemented a two-phased notification protocol, for all instances involving non-emergency interior work. The Company will first attempt to contact customers telephonically prior to performing any non-emergency interior

service to notify them of the upcoming work and safety protocols in place. Customers will be given the option to schedule this work at a later date if there are health-related concerns. On the date of the scheduled work, Company field personnel will conduct a verbal screening before entering a customer's premises. If the customer provides responses that suggest entry could lead to a potential exposure, then interior work will be delayed until a later date. If the customer refuses access due to COVID-19 concerns, the Company will schedule the appointment at a later date and will not exercise its right to disconnect service for non-access/refusal of access to utility equipment, except in situations where there is an identified safety concern or fraud/tampering, for the remainder of the year.

11. The following operational activities will resume no sooner than 45 days after the filing of this Plan, to the extent those activities can be achieved with adequate preventative safety measures against COVID-19 risks while in the customer's premises. Duke Energy Ohio will continue to evaluate the safety of each non-essential order and defer those where field performers cannot reasonably avoid contagion risk at a specific premises:

- a. Effective August 10, 2020, Duke Energy Ohio will resume activities for all suspended, delayed, and/or deferred, non-essential utility service-related activities (*not including disconnections for non-payment*) for interior meters. Such activities may include, but are not limited to, routine inspections, routine meter reading,¹³ off-cycle meter reads/re-reads, and non-essential meter/service replacements.¹⁴

¹³ The Company has resumed interior meter reading for certain non-residential customers that contacted the Company and expressed a desire not to have estimated meter readings during this time and specifically asked for manual meter reading.

¹⁴ Includes commencing compliance on a going forward basis under the following provisions of the Ohio Administrative Code as contained in the Company's First and Second Motions: 4901:10-05(F)(1); 4901:10-05-(I)(1); 4901:10-05(I)(2); 4901:10-05(I)(3); 4901:1-10-05(J)(4); 4901:10-05(I)(3); 4901:1-13-04(D); 4901:1-18-07(A) and

- b. Effective August 10, 2020, Duke Energy Ohio will:
 - i. Resume customer-requested disconnections of internal natural gas utility service;¹⁵
 - ii. Resume compliance repairs of service lines that previously had a temporary remedy so the service did not have to be disconnected; and
 - iii. Resume investigations required under O.A.C. 4901:1-10-04(C).¹⁶
- c. Effective August 17, 2020, Duke Energy Ohio will resume compliance with service renewals for low cathodic protection reads. The Company will follow its customer communication scheduling protocol described above in scheduling the service renewal program appointments;
- d. Effective August 21, 2020, Duke Energy Ohio will resume compliance with remediating grade two (2) leaks; and
- e. Effective August 24, 2020, Duke Energy Ohio will resume DBLS beyond those first prioritized.

12. The Company anticipates that all previously delayed, deferred, and suspended non-essential operations will have resumed by September 1, 2020.

13. Duke Energy Ohio requests that the Commission provide Duke Energy Ohio until May 31, 2021, to catch up and come into compliance with requirements related to in-premises inspections not prompted by an identified safety-related concern that were temporarily suspended,

(B); Rule 4901:1-13-04(G)(1); Rule 4901:1-13-04(G)(5); Rule 4901:1-13-04(G)(6); 4901:1-13-05(A); 4901:1-13-05(D); and 4901:1-16-04(I).

¹⁵ Electric disconnections can occur remotely.

¹⁶ Included in the Company's First Motion and waiver granted in June 17th Order.

delayed, and/or rescheduled by the Company or customer due to COVID-19 concerns, as well as all rule waivers granted by the Commission's June 17th Order.¹⁷

14. In addition to resuming the above-listed operational activities, the Company will gradually progress towards resuming normal billing processes, including, but not limited to, disconnections for nonpayment as follows:

- a. Duke Energy Ohio will continue its proactive communications with customers using text messaging, emails, and banners on the Company's website, that will inform customers of the resumption of previously suspended fees and/or charges, disconnection notices, and the resumption of disconnection for non-payment and encourage customers with arrearages to enter into a payment arrangement.
- b. Beginning August 10, 2020, the Company will resume normal billing processes, which will include assessing late payment fees during the regular billing cycles, and, issuing disconnection notices to customers.¹⁸ The Company will abide by all required notices for disconnection timelines. The Company estimates disconnections for non-payment under regular credit and notice timelines would begin during the month of September for residential and non-residential customers.
- c. Beginning September 1, 2020, the Company will also resume assessing reconnection fees.

¹⁷ See June 17th Order pp.5-6, 9-10.

¹⁸ For example, if a customer is billed on August 10, 2020, the normal billing practice will allow the customer 21 days to pay their bill. If payment is not received by that due date, a late payment fee will then be assessed.

- d. Duke Energy Ohio will coordinate with the Ohio Development Services Agency to resume the Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP) Program and Graduate PIPP Program as they were in place prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic.
- e. The Company will resume third-party payment processing fees effective October 1, 2020.

For the reasons stated above, Duke Energy Ohio respectfully requests that the Commission approve this Plan.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Rocco O. D'Ascenzo

Rocco O. D'Ascenzo (0077651)

Deputy General Counsel

Jeanne W. Kingery (0012172)

Counsel of Record

Associate General Counsel

Larisa M. Vaysman (0090290)

Senior Counsel

Duke Energy Business Services LLC

139 East Fourth Street

1303-Main

Cincinnati, OH 45202

(513) 287-4320 (telephone)

(513) 287-4385 (facsimile)

Rocco.DAscenzo@duke-energy.com

Jeanne.Kingery@duke-energy.com

Larisa.Vaysman@duke-energy.com

Attorneys for Duke Energy Ohio, Inc.

Willing to accept service via e-mail

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I certify that the Transition Plan of Duke Energy Ohio, Inc., was served by First-Class U.S. Mail or electronic delivery upon counsel identified below for all parties of record this 26th day of June, 2020.

/s/ Rocco O. D'Ascenzo
Rocco O. D'Ascenzo

Michael L. Kurtz
Kurt J. Boehm
Jody Kyler Cohn
BOEHM, KURTZ & LOWRY
36 East Seventh Street, Suite 1510
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202
Ph: (513) 421-2255
Fax: (513) 421-2764
E-Mail: mkurtz@BKLawfirm.com
kboehm@BKLawfirm.com
jkylercohn@BKLawfirm.com

Counsel for The Ohio Energy Group

Robert Dove
Kegler Brown Hill + Ritter Co., L.P.A.
65 E. State St., Ste. 1800
Columbus, OH 43215-4295
Office: (614) 462-5443
rdove@keglerbrown.com

Counsel for Ohio Partners for Affordable Energy

William Michael
Counsel of Record
Ambrosia E. Wilson
Assistant Consumers' Counsel
Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel
65 East State Street, 7th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215-4213
Telephone [Michael]: (614) 466-1291
Telephone [Wilson]: (614) 466-1292
William.Michael@occ.ohio.gov
Ambrosia.Wilson@occ.ohio.gov

Counsel for the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

Miranda Leppla
Counsel of Record
Trent Dougherty
Chris Tavenor
1145 Chesapeake Avenue, Suite I
Columbus, Ohio 43212-3449
(614) 487-7506 - Telephone
(614) 487-7510 - Fax
mleppla@theOEC.org
tdougherty@theOEC.org
ctavenor@theOEC.org

Counsel for the Ohio Environmental Council

Kimberly W. Bojko
Carpenter Lipps & Leland LLP
280 North High Street, Suite 1300
Columbus, Ohio 43215
Telephone: (614) 365-4100
Facsimile: (614) 365-9145
bojko@carpenterlipps.com

*Counsel for the Ohio Manufacturers'
Association Energy Group*

Angela Paul Whitfield
Carpenter Lipps & Leland LLP
280 North High Street, Suite 1300
Columbus, Ohio 43215
Telephone: (614) 365-4100
paul@carpenterlipps.com

Counsel for The Kroger Company

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Summary: Notice Transition Plan of Duke Energy Ohio, Inc. electronically filed by Mrs. Tammy M Meyer on behalf of Duke Energy Ohio Inc. and D'Ascenzo, Rocco