

**BEFORE  
THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF OHIO**

In the Matter of the Application of Ohio	)	
Power Company for Approval of its	)	Case No. 20-0602-EL-UNC
Temporary Plan for Addressing the COVID-19	)	
State of Emergency.	)	
	)	
In the Matter of the Application of Ohio	)	
Power Company for Waiver of Tariffs and	)	Case No. 20-0603-EL-WVR
Rules Related to the COVID-19 State of	)	
Emergency.	)	
	)	
In the Matter of the Application of Ohio	)	
Power Company for Approval of	)	Case No. 20-0604-EL-AAM
Certain Accounting Authority.	)	
	)	
In the Matter of the Application of Ohio	)	
Power Company for Approval of	)	Case No. 20-734-EL-AEC
A Reasonable Arrangement.	)	

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**COMMENTS OF OHIO PARTNERS FOR AFFORDABLE ENERGY REGARDING  
THE TRANSITION PLAN FILED BY OHIO POWER COMPANY.**

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**I. Introduction**

The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (“Commission”) issued Entries on March 12, 2020 and March 13, 2020 in Case No. 20-591-AU-UNC, requiring utilities to review their business practices in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and request waivers of Commission rules as necessary to comply with the Orders of the Director of the Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control. On March 17, 2020, March 24, 2020, and April 9, 2020, in Case No. 20-602-EL-UNC, the Ohio Power Company/AEP Ohio (“AEP”) requested a number of rule suspensions, and committed to cease disconnecting customers and to reconnecting customers. AEP also suspended in-person audit and weatherization programs. Of those programs, the Community Assistance Program serves low-income customers and is delivered through Ohio

Partners for Affordable Energy's ("OPAE") member agencies.

On July 6, 2020, AEP filed its plan for transitioning out of the waivers and temporary policies that were followed during the emergency phase of the pandemic response (the "Plan"). Ohio Partners for Affordable Energy offers the following comments regarding the proposed plan developed in conjunction with Staff per the Commission Finding and Order issued on May 20, 2020.

## **I. COMMENTS**

### **A. Disconnection of Service**

AEP proposes to resume sending notice of disconnections for nonpayment and other reasons permitted under the rules on August 1, 2020, and begin disconnecting clients 30 days later. While OPAE has advocated for a longer extension of the moratoria, this position was rejected by the Commission in its Finding and Order in Case No. 20-657-GA-UNC, so OPAE will not restate its position here. However, OPAE does note that DEO proposed approaches to fees and deposits until issuance of the annual Winter Reconnect Order, and proposed extended repayment plans. These proposals, coupled with the availability of PIPP to those unemployed for 30 days that meet the income criteria, will provide customers assistance during the gap between the restart of disconnections and the issuance of the Winter Reconnect Order.

### **B. Late Payments and Deposits**

OPAE views the AEP proposals regarding late payments and deposits to be adequate. A further waiver of deposits would be helpful, but with the requirements not attaching until November, clients will be able to work through OPAE's agency network and either obtain the funds necessary for a deposit or enroll in PIPP, which will obviate the need for a deposit. Waiving late fees accrued by customers since the onset of the pandemic is a positive step, as is

waiving late fees for those customers who enroll in a payment plan and pay on time. Still, there is a need to minimize bills and keep people on the system. Ohio did not allow late fees for many years, and should consider reinstating a similar policy. Likewise, the factoring aspect of late fees is a function of choices made by AEP and does not, in and of itself, constitute a utility service. However, this is an issue best left to when recovery of deferrals is considered.

### **C. Payment Plans**

OPAE offers no comments on the non-residential plans. OPAE's member agencies have remained open and have not seen significant reductions in revenue, other than because of closed weatherization programs, and are paying their bills.

OPAE is concerned about the downpayment requirements AEP seeks for payment plans for residential customers. A number of other utilities have agreed to forego downpayments as a part of payment plans because large downpayment requirements make it less likely a client can afford a payment plan, and more likely they will be pushed onto PIPP. That, unfortunately, will not be an effective solution for a family where wage earners were laid off for several months, got their job back, but are faced with past due mortgage payments or rent along with utility arrears. OPAE recommends the Commission direct AEP to forego requiring a down payment as a requirement of entering a payment plan.

OPAE applauds AEP's willingness to offer payment plans of up to 12 months. Allowing customers to go on Budget or AMP even though they have an arrearage is also a positive aspect of the Plan. However, Budget and AMP are not designed to address arrears; they are excellent tools for managing bills, but should be recognized for what they are.

### **D. Deferrals**

OPAE will defer commenting on issues of deferrals and recovery until the issue is ripe.

We do note that AEP presumes approval of the bad debt tracker included in its recent rate case filing, and should not presume approval of this recovery mechanism in its plan.

#### **E. Waiver Request Update**

The customer service aspects of the Plan are generally consistent with those of other utilities and warrant approval. Everyone working under the utility umbrella wants customers to stay safe and to stay safe themselves. OPAE's agencies are handling intake predominantly through the phone and online, with drop boxes outside the agencies where clients can provide the necessary documentation. OPAE's field personnel are checked daily, just as AEP and the other utilities have described, and have modified their workplace activities to ensure social distancing. COVID-19 must be taken seriously, and OPAE is proud to partner with corporations that feel the same way.

AEP's proposals regarding PIPP customers do not follow the decision of the Commission in the Finding and Order issued regarding Vectren's waiver request filed in Case No. 20-649-GA-UNC on June 17, 2020. As the Commission noted in its June 3, 2020 Finding and Order in the Vectren docket:

[D]uring the emergency, or until otherwise specified by the Commission, PIPP participants and Graduate PIPP participants shall not be removed or dropped from the programs or prohibited from enrolling in the programs for not be current, for failure to comply with programs requirements as of the customer's anniversary date, or for failure to timely reverify eligibility. Finding and Order at 12-13.

Thus, AEP's proposal to reinstate the requirements of O.A.C. 4901:1-18-12(D)(1) and O.A.C. 4901:1-18-17(A) and (B) beginning in October after approval of this Plan is inappropriate. OPAE appreciates that AEP's timeline would not result in drops until November or December, but the issue is the ability to make up missed payments. The Commission addressed this issue in the Columbia case:

[T]he Commission directs that PIPP income-based payments due or billed to the PIPP participant as of March 12, 2020 through July 28, 2020, which have not been paid by July 29, 2020, shall be added to the PIPP or Graduate PIPP participant's arrearage. If the customer is no longer eligible for PIPP or does not wish to be enrolled in Graduate PIPP, Columbia should offer the customer the extended payment plans. Case No. 20-637-GA-UNC, Finding and Order at pp. 12-13 (June 17, 2020).

The Commission has jurisdiction over natural gas PIPP, while the Ohio Development Services Agency ("ODSA") establishes the rule for electric PIPP. As of today, ODSA has not issued its policy on whether missed PIPP payments will be rolled into arrears as the Commission is requiring for natural gas utilities, nor when or if the anniversary date requirements will be reinstated. AEP cannot unilaterally determine how it will address missed payments and the anniversary date issues. Those decisions are reserved to ODSA.

### **III. Conclusion**

AEP's service territory has been battered economically for some time. The Company has crafted a plan that by and large recognizes the reality faced by its customers. OPAE urges approval of the plan, with the modification suggested above.

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**CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

I certify that The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio's e-filing system will electronically serve notice of the filing of this document on the parties referenced on the service list of the docket card who have electronically subscribed to the case.

/s/ Robert Dove  
Robert Dove

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Summary: Comments on Ohio Power Company's Updated Compliance Plan and Report electronically filed by Mr. Robert Dove on behalf of Ohio Partners for Affordable Energy