

2021 -- H 5514

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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2021

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A N A C T

RELATING TO PUBLIC UTILITIES AND CARRIERS -- DUTIES OF UTILITIES AND  
CARRIERS

Introduced By: Representatives Tobon, Alzate, Edwards, Barros, and Craven

Date Introduced: February 12, 2021

Referred To: House Corporations

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Chapter 39-2 of the General Laws entitled "Duties of Utilities and Carriers"  
2 is hereby amended by adding thereto the following section:

3 **39-2-1.5. Minimum customer service levels.**

4 (a) Every public utility shall provide prompt and adequate customer service to its  
5 ratepayers.

6 (b) Each electric distribution company as defined in § 39-1-2 having greater than one  
7 hundred thousand (100,000) customers and each gas distribution company included as a public  
8 utility as defined in § 39-1-2 having greater than one hundred thousand (100,000) customers shall  
9 provide prompt installation of new service and service upgrades to its ratepayers, including  
10 providing status updates to ratepayers regarding installation and upgrade-related wait times.

11 (c) The commission shall establish appropriate customer service standards and procedures  
12 to implement this section. The commission shall conduct a review at least once every five (5) years  
13 to ensure service quality standards and procedures related to this section are sufficient.

14 (d) The commission may evaluate and address the performance of any company that  
15 requests a rate increase as part of the rate case review process, in accordance with subsections (a)  
16 and (b) of this section. The commission may require improved performance, including proof of  
17 improvement, prior to approving any rate increase.

18 (e) Any ratepayer who alleges that an electric distribution company or gas distribution

1 company has failed to provide prompt and adequate customer service, or that the electric  
2 distribution company or gas distribution company has failed to promptly install service upgrades  
3 or new service in accordance with subsection (b) of this section, may submit a formal or informal  
4 complaint with the division. The division shall investigate and rule upon all complaints in an  
5 expedited manner and shall provide status updates to the ratepayer as the investigation proceeds.

6 (f) The division shall have the authority to assess a penalty, in accordance with § 39-2-8,  
7 against any utility that fails or neglects to provide prompt and adequate customer service, or to  
8 promptly install service upgrades or new service, as determined by the division.

9 SECTION 2. Section 39-2-8 of the General Laws in Chapter 39-2 entitled "Duties of  
10 Utilities and Carriers" is hereby amended to read as follows:

11 **39-2-8. Penalty for violations.**

12 Any public utility which shall violate any provision of chapters 1 -- 5 of this title, or shall  
13 do any act herein prohibited, or shall fail or refuse to perform any duty enjoined upon it for which  
14 a penalty has not been provided, shall be subject to a penalty of not less than two hundred dollars  
15 (\$200) nor more than ~~one ten~~ thousand dollars ~~(\$1,000)~~ (\$10,000), and in the case of a continuing  
16 violation of any of the provisions of the chapters, every day's continuance thereof shall be deemed  
17 to be a separate and distinct offense. Any penalty provided in this section shall not be recoverable  
18 from ratepayers in future rates.

19 SECTION 3. Chapter 39-3 of the General Laws entitled "Regulatory Powers of  
20 Administration" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following section:

21 **39-3-37.4. Itemized bills -- Electrical distribution company.**

22 (a) Every electrical distribution company which charges for the distribution of electricity  
23 to any house, building, tenement or estate, shall provide upon request an itemized bill or statement  
24 following any installation, construction, site visit, or other service for which there is any fee to the  
25 ratepayer.

26 (b) The electrical distribution company shall provide the requesting ratepayer with a  
27 detailed written estimate prior to performing any installation, construction, site visit or other  
28 service, unless the total estimated cost for the service is five hundred dollars (\$500) or less.

29 SECTION 4. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION  
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
OF

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1           This act would require public utilities and electric distribution companies to provide  
2 prompt and adequate service to its ratepayers relating to new service and service upgrades, subject  
3 to a penalty of up to ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) per violation. Electric distribution companies  
4 would be required to provide upon request written estimates of any work to be performed of more  
5 than five hundred dollars (\$500) and an itemized bill for work performed for any fee payable by  
6 the ratepayer.

7           This act would take effect upon passage.

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