

STATE OF IOWA
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
UTILITIES BOARD

IN RE: WINTER MORATORIUM EXTENSION;	DOCKET NO. SPU-2020-0003
IN RE: IOWA AMERICAN WATER COMPANY;	DOCKET NO. ARU-2020-0123
IN RE: INTERSTATE POWER AND LIGHT COMPANY;	DOCKET NO. ARU-2020-0150
IN RE: MIDAMERICAN ENERGY COMPANY;	DOCKET NO. ARU-2020-0156
IN RE: LIBERTY UTILITIES (MIDSTATES NATURAL GAS) CORP d/b/a LIBERTY UTILITIES; AND	DOCKET NO. ARU-2020-0222
IN RE: BLACK HILLS/IOWA GAS UTILITY COMPANY, LLC d/b/a BLACK HILLS ENERGY	DOCKET NO. ARU-2020-0225

**REPLY TO RESISTANCE TO OCA’S RESPONSE
TO ADDITIONAL REPORTING INSTRUCTIONS**

COMES NOW the Office of Consumer Advocate (OCA), a division of the Iowa Department of Justice, and offers the following in reply to the responses to OCA’s “Response to Additional Reporting Requirements” (Response) filed with the Iowa Utilities Board (Board) by Interstate Power and Light Company (IPL) on July 14, 2020, and MidAmerican Energy Company (MidAmerican) on July 28, 2020:

1. The Board intended its May 1 Order to be “one step in a series of actions to be taken by the Board, formally and informally, to provide assistance to customers and utilities and to aid in Iowa’s recovery” from the COVID-19 pandemic. Through its prior orders, the Board extended the winter moratorium for utility customers until the Governor lifted the public health emergency. As such restrictions on disconnection ended, the Board recognized that coordination was needed among the Board, utilities, and partner agencies “to minimize ramifications while assuring both safe, reliable service to customers and just and reasonable compensation to the utilities.” (May 1 Order, pp. 2-3).

2. As part of its coordination effort to “minimize ramifications,” the Board required all rate-regulated utilities to file monthly residential customer reports and weekly updates, which are to include information relevant to the annual moratorium on the disconnection of residential electric or natural gas customers as identified in Board rules 199 IAC 19.2(5)(j) and 199 IAC 20.2(5)(j). (May 1 Order, pp. 5, 8). In addition, the Board determined it appropriate for additional specific disconnection and payment plan information for residential, commercial, and industrial customers. (May 1 Order, pp. 6, 8). The Board directed that rate-regulated utilities are to file these reports through September 4, 2020, and that all reporting categories are to be separated by residential, commercial, and industrial customer classes in addition to the totals reported for all classes. (May 1 Order, p. 8).

3. In its Response to these additional reporting instructions, OCA asked that the Board require companies submitting this data to report the information by census tract, or at least by zip code. OCA asserted that obtaining utility- specific customer information, as well as disconnection and payment plan information for residential, commercial, and industrial customers at the census tract level will allow the Board to review important demographic

information from the U.S. Census Bureau and will provide information that is crucial to the understanding and identification of customers who could most benefit from important energy efficiency programs and services, weatherization services, consumer education, or LIHEAP eligibility.

4. Despite having relied on Census Bureau data in the past to describe the economic challenges faced by its customers,¹ IPL states in its reply to OCA's Response that providing detailed customer statistics by census tract or zip code would require additional programming and expense. MidAmerican makes a similar argument stating that its systems are not capable of providing the granular data requested by OCA and the modifications that would be necessary to provide such data would cost thousands of dollars and take weeks to complete. OCA does not dispute that some changes may need to be made to companies' systems, but the assertions made by IPL and MidAmerican that these changes would be unnecessarily costly or burdensome are difficult to understand. These companies employ sophisticated billing systems and know which customers are behind on their bills, receive disconnection notices, have service disconnected or restored, or who have entered into deferred payment agreements – and they have the addresses of these customers and their zip codes. OCA is simply asking that the Board require these companies to provide the Census tract data or zip codes that correspond to the customer information that they are already providing to the Board in response to the Board's May 1 Order.

5. Requiring companies to provide the requested information by census tract or zip code also provides some consistency among the reports, which is currently lacking. At this time, companies are reporting weekly data in different ways. For example, some provide month-to-date totals while other provide weekly totals; revenues owed on accounts by class are reported

¹ *In re: Interstate Power and Light Co.*, Docket No. RPU-2019-0001, "OCA Parker Direct Testimony," p. 8 and "OCA Parker Direct Exhibit 4 – IPL Response to OCA DR No. 15" (filed Aug. 1, 2019).

differently, etc. While the companies argue that there are administrative challenges reporting the required information by Census tract or zip code, there are currently significant administrative challenges to reviewing the information reported by these companies when there is a lack of consistency among the companies as to how the information is actually reported. OCA is currently working with the companies to obtain clarity regarding the way each report is submitted, but requiring the companies to submit the information in the same format and by Census tract or zip code will help create consistency among the reports, alleviate the burden of reviewing and comparing mismatched data among companies, and make the reported data much more useful.

6. The challenges posed by the COVID-19 health crisis have heightened the importance of sustained, affordable access to essential home energy service for all households across Iowa and the Board has an obligation to help communities in need retain these essential services. Yet, as OCA noted in its Response, there is only a limited data-driven understanding of the customers and households that struggle with utility affordability and security. Without the appropriate data, energy affordability challenges remain ambiguous and the effectiveness of utility credit and collections practices cannot be adequately assessed. Moreover, the absence of this data impedes the development and implementation of effective programs and policies to address access and affordability challenges. If the customer data required by the Board were collected by Census tract or zip code, companies could, for example, identify those zip codes where the majority of the population earns less than the national poverty rate and companies could then focus their energy efficiency assistance efforts and get the best savings value for their energy efficiency dollars.

7. As the rate-regulated utilities were authorized to resume disconnections in July and not all have resumed disconnections or are proceeding under a staggered basis, the reporting of data required in the May 1 Order should continue until the winter moratorium begins for gas and electric utilities or for at least 3 months following the utility's full resumption of customer disconnections. The reporting of data should continue beyond September 4, 2020 for a sufficient amount of time to permit consideration and analysis of the circumstances faced by utility customers.

WHEREFORE, for the foregoing reasons, OCA requests the Board require rate-regulated utilities to file the additional reporting, pursuant to the Board's May 1 Order, by census tract or zip code.

Respectfully submitted,

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