

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION505 VAN NESS AVENUE
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April 15, 2021

VIA E-MAIL

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To: Pacific Gas and Electric Company, Southern California Edison Company, San Diego Gas & Electric Company, Southern California Gas Company, Liberty Utilities, Pacific Power, Bear Valley Electric Service, Southwest Gas Corporation, West Coast Gas Company, and Alpine Natural Gas:

Subject: Direction to Conduct Customer Data Validation for Emergency Rental Assistance Program

On December 27, 2020, the federal Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 was signed into law, establishing the federal Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) and authorizing allocations of funds to states, local governments, tribal communities, and territories to assist renters with unpaid rent and utility bills accrued between April 1, 2020, and March 31, 2021. California Senate Bill 91 (2021) established California's program for administering and distributing rental assistance funds, authorizing the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) to administer the funds in accordance with state and federal law, and providing a framework for cities, counties, and tribes that received a direct allocation of funds from the U.S. Treasury to implement ERAP funding in partnership with HCD.

Before distributing funds, HCD and partner cities, counties, and tribes must perform due diligence to validate customer information. The HCD application process requires customers requesting ERAP relief to consent to HCD providing their submitted information to other entities for the purpose of validating eligibility. HCD has requested that IOUs validate customer application information for eligibility purposes once provided by HCD pursuant to the customer's request for ERAP relief.

This letter serves as a notification that the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) plans to take action to enable validation of utility customer information between the utilities and HCD and its partner cities, counties, and tribes to facilitate HCD's administration of its ERAP for utility arrearages.

Specifically, the CPUC authorizes each IOU and SMJU to validate utility customer information of applicants for ERAP, upon HCD's request or upon request of a partner city, county, or tribe, for the purpose of administering relief. The data shall not be shared or used for any other purpose. Each IOU and SMJU should implement the validation activities described in this letter immediately.

While the HCD Rental Relief Program is not a CPUC program, the program is an important opportunity to provide much-needed relief to the utility debts of a significant number of Californians. Between February 2020 and February 2021, the large energy IOUs reported an increase in total residential unpaid bills from approximately \$500 million to more than \$1.3 billion in total. Of that amount, nearly half is owed by customers enrolled in income-qualified rate assistance programs California Alternate Rates for Energy (CARE) or Family Electric Rate Assistance (FERA).

In response to this urgent need, the CPUC recently opened a new proceeding, Rulemaking (R.) 21-02-014, to address the increase in utility customer arrearages. In that proceeding, the Administrative Law Judge has emphasized the importance of leveraging ERAP funds to maximize their benefit for

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California ratepayers, and has specifically directed IOUs to undertake actions to (1) confirm that utility customers can access the resources that have been made available, and (2) expose any barriers to accessing the HCD ERAP relief funding so that barriers may be promptly addressed.

Given the scale of the problem and the need for immediate relief, utilities should dedicate resources to work rapidly to validate the information provided by HCD and its partner cities, counties, and tribes.

I intend to request ratification by the full Commission of the actions directed by this letter at a future Commission business meeting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rachel Peterson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rachel Peterson
Executive Director