

Decision No. R24-0558-I

BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF COLORADO

PROCEEDING NO. 23M-0464EG

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMMISSION'S IMPLEMENTATION OF ASPECTS OF SENATE BILL 23-291 INCLUDING ITS CONSIDERATION OF CUSTOMER CONNECTIONS TO AND DISCONNECTIONS FROM INVESTOR-OWNED ELECTRIC AND GAS UTILITY SYSTEMS AND THE STUDY OF POTENTIAL BARRIERS TO BENEFICIAL ELECTRIFICATION AND DISTRIBUTED ENERGY RESOURCES.

**INTERIM DECISION OF HEARING COMMISSIONER
MEGAN M. GILMAN
ISSUING QUESTIONS FOR RESPONSE FROM MEMBERS
OF THE PUBLIC AND UTILITIES REGARDING A
CUSTOMER'S VOLUNTARY DISCONNECTION FROM
GAS UTILITY SERVICE**

Issued Date: August 2, 2024

I. STATEMENT

1. By Decision No. C23-0627, issued on September 18, 2023, the Commission opened this Proceeding to implement certain provisions in Senate Bill (SB) 23-291 related to customer connections to and disconnections from investor-owned electric and gas utility systems. The Commission designated Commissioner Megan M. Gilman as Hearing Commissioner pursuant to § 40-6-101(2), C.R.S.

2. Through this Proceeding, the Commission has completed the study required of it by SB 23-291 into the potential barriers to beneficial electrification of transportation and buildings and the deployment of distributed energy resources. A consultant report recommended short- and long-term process improvements for investor-owned electric utilities for consideration by the Commission to alleviate certain of the identified barriers.¹

¹ See Decision No. R24-0242-I in this Proceeding (issued on April 18, 2024, discussing the study).

3. Next, the Commission intends to examine the issue of a customer's voluntary termination of gas service at a premise. SB 23-291, codified at § 40-3.2-104.5, C.R.S., provides new statutory provisions specific to this issue and contemplates that the Commission may adopt administrative rules to further guide this process. To that end, the Hearing Commissioner sets forth in this Decision a series of initial questions for response by members of the public including individuals, organizations, municipalities, stakeholders, and other interested persons regarding this disconnection issue. The Hearing Commissioner also sets forth targeted questions for response by the investor-owned gas utilities. Responses are requested to be filed into this Proceeding through the Commission's E-Filings System no later than **September 5, 2024**.

II. QUESTIONS FOR RESPONSE

A. Questions to Stakeholders and Other Members of the Public

4. SB 23-291 (codified at § 40-3.2-104.5(1), C.R.S.) provides as follows:
1. [A]n investor-owned gas utility shall not penalize or charge a fee to a customer that voluntarily terminates gas service. Once a customer has terminated the investor-owned utility's gas service, the utility shall not continue to charge the customer any fees.
 2. The statute also contemplates, at § 40-3.2-104.5(2), Commission-adopted rules that establish standards for a customer's voluntary disconnection and sets forth certain considerations for the Commission if it undertakes such rulemaking. Given this context, provide your perspective on the following questions:
 - a. Does this statutory language provide sufficient assurance that utilities will not charge customers for voluntary termination of gas service or the necessary steps to result in a voluntary termination of gas service—or are additional Commission rules necessary?
 - b. If Commission rules are necessary, what specific issues or parameters should be addressed in the Commission rulemaking?

- c. Is it necessary that each gas utility's tariff include specific provisions addressing the statutory requirements around fees and charges for the voluntary termination of gas services?

5. Based on your personal experience and/or that of people with whom your organization interacts, outline what you understand to be the typical steps and timeline of voluntarily terminating gas service, including as regards the following issues:

- a. What is a typical length of time between a customer's request for termination of gas service and completion of that request by the utility?
- b. Identify the discrete steps that you are familiar with in completing a request to terminate gas service that must be taken by the customer, as well as those taken by the gas utility. What is the length of time you have experienced between these steps?
- c. To the extent the items above vary by customer class or building type (residential, commercial, *etc.*), please indicate any differences.

6. Gas utilities typically charge a monthly fee, variously called the "Service & Facility" or "S&F" charge, "Facilities Charge," "Customer Charge," or "Monthly Charge," which is a fixed amount, independent of how much or how little gas a customer consumes in the month.

Regarding this fixed monthly charge, respond to the following questions:

- a. Do customers have experiences related to utilities continuing to collect a monthly charge after a customer has requested to permanently terminate gas service at a facility?
- b. If so, provide details related to this experience and the timeline of resolving the continued collection of the monthly charge.

7. Based on your personal experience and/or that of people with whom your organization interacts, assess the following issues regarding gas utility customer service:

- a. Can a customer voluntarily terminate gas service through their online account or is it necessary to call a customer service representative?
- a. Are customer service representatives adequately prepared to respond to requests for voluntary termination of gas service, are they familiar with the nature of the request, and are they able to competently answer questions and provide useful information to help the customer navigate this process?
- b. Are customer service representatives readily able to distinguish between requests to terminate gas service at a property and requests to stop service to a

customer, rather than a premise (*e.g.*, when a customer is moving and therefore requests to stop being billed for any service the utility provides to that premise)?

- c. Are customers able to initiate the process of voluntary gas disconnection in real time, live, with a customer service representative or are they directed elsewhere to initiate the process?

8. Is there any additional information regarding the customer experience of requesting voluntary termination of gas service that you would like to share with the Commission?

9. Please provide feedback on any differences in the terminology of “voluntary disconnection,” “voluntary termination,” or other variations in terms, and if the meanings are fundamentally different, in what circumstances the Commission should use each term.

B. Questions to Investor-Owned Gas Utilities

10. Considering SB 23-291 (codified at § 40-3.2-104.5(1), C.R.S.), does the utility see any processes or equipment involved in the voluntary termination or permanent disconnection of gas service for which the utility believes they would directly charge individual customers requesting such termination or disconnection? If so, identify where such charges are currently specified in the utility’s tariff or the utility’s underlying justification as to what charges or fees the utility believes could be assessed.

11. Does the utility have a process designed, and in place, to receive and carry out requests for voluntary termination of gas service from individual retail customers?

12. Detail the process associated with a retail customer’s request for voluntary termination of gas service, including for customers beginning this process by contacting a customer service representative by phone or through the utility’s website. Specifically identify each distinct step in the process undertaken by the customer or the utility from the initial request through the removal of the meter and cessation in billing the gas customer. Include the general timeline associated with each step of this process.

13. Provide a copy of any forms, attestations, or other documentation required to be submitted by customers requesting voluntary termination of their gas service. Identify the use of the specific required forms, attestations, or other documentation in the utility's process to fulfill the termination of service, including any portions of the process identified above that are related to specific documents.

14. Please provide feedback on any differences in the terminology of "voluntary disconnection," "voluntary termination," or other variations in terms, and if the meanings are fundamentally different, in what circumstances the Commission should use each term.

15. To the extent the utility is tracking voluntary gas termination, provide the following information:

- a. The number of voluntary gas terminations requested by month for the past three years.
- b. The average, maximum, and minimum timeline between a customer's original request for voluntary termination of gas service and: (1) physical removal of the customer's meter and (2) the last billing to the customer for Service & Facility charge or any other charge related to receipt or availability of gas service at the property.
- c. If some or all of the items above are not tracked currently, identify the feasibility associated with tracking such information.

III. ORDER

A. It Is Ordered That:

1. Responses to the questions set forth in this Decision are requested to be filed into this Proceeding no later than **September 5, 2024**.

2. This Decision is effective immediately.

(S E A L)



THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION
OF THE STATE OF COLORADO

MEGAN M. GILMAN

Hearing Commissioner

ATTEST: A TRUE COPY

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Rebecca E. White'.

Rebecca E. White,
Director