

PHIL MURPHY
Governor

SHEILA OLIVER
Lt. Governor

BRIAN O. LIPMAN
Director

June 27, 2023

Via Electronic Mail

Ms. Sherri L. Golden, Board Secretary New Jersey Board of Public Utilities 44 South Clinton Avenue, 1<sup>st</sup> floor P.O. Box 350 Trenton, NJ 08625-0350 Board.Secretary@bpu.nj.gov sherri.golden@bpu.nj.gov

Re: I/M/O the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities' Response

to the COVID-19 Pandemic BPU Docket No. AO20060471

Dear Secretary Golden:

Please accept for filing this letter brief of the New Jersey Division of Rate Counsel ("Rate Counsel") in opposition to the motion for reconsideration of the Board's June 7, 2023 Order, filed by Atlantic City Electric Company ("ACE") on June 22, 2023. Consistent with the March 19, 2020 Order of the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities ("BPU" or the "Board") in I/M/O the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities' Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic for a Temporary Waiver of Requirements for Certain Non-Essential Obligations, BPU Docket No. 20030254, copies of this comment letter are being filed with each person on the service list by electronic mail. No paper copies will follow. Please acknowledge receipt of this comment letter. Thank you for your consideration and attention to this matter.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The Board cannot grant the relief requested by ACE, as it would require the Board to reverse, modify or vacate an Order it issued almost three years ago, or to re-write a statute. ACE is far out of time to request the former, and the Board cannot do the latter. ACE also has not even alleged any error of law or fact in the Board's June 7, 2023 Order that would merit reconsideration. Instead, this motion is another attempt by ACE to avoid Board review of its claims for incremental costs related to the COVID-19 pandemic and a collateral attack on its pending NGC/SBC filing. Since it lacks any legal or factual support, ACE's motion should be denied.

#### **BACKGROUND**

The Board issued an Order almost three years ago, on July 2, 2020, setting forth the procedure for addressing the utilities' incremental costs arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. The utilities were authorized to establish a regulatory asset to account for their prudently incurred incremental costs, and to request recovery of those incremental amounts through a filing either in this COVID-19 proceeding or in a base rate case. This process would enable the Board to review the prudence of each utility's claims, and to exercise its discretionary authority to determine the types and amounts of each claim that are recoverable. That July 2, 2020 Board Order was clear and unambiguous about the procedures it established.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> <u>I/M/O the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities' Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic</u>, BPU Docket No. AO20060471, July 2, 2020 ("July 2020 Order")

The Board's June 7, 2023 Order in this proceeding stated that all filings for cost recovery of COVID-19 regulatory asset balances will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, and reiterated that those claims may be presented as part of a base rate case or a separate proceeding. That Order did not decide the types or amounts of cost claims that a utility may recover. Instead, it listed the required elements of a cost recovery proposal if a utility chooses to request recovery of COVID-19 regulatory asset balances independent of a base rate case. The June 7, 2023 Board Order did not change the two available options for a utility to request recovery of its incremental COVID-related cost claims.

#### **DISCUSSION**

#### **ACE's Motion Provides No Basis for Reconsideration**

A party may ask the Board to reconsider a decision or order, in a properly supported motion under N.J.A.C. 14:1-8.6(a). Under that rule,

A motion for rehearing, reargument, or reconsideration of a proceeding may be filed by any party within 15 days after the effective date of any final decision or order by the Board.

- 1. Such motion shall state in separately numbered paragraphs the alleged errors of law or fact relied upon and shall specify whether reconsideration, reargument, rehearing or further hearing is requested and whether the ultimate relief sought is reversal, modification, vacation or suspension of the action taken by the Board or other relief.
- 2. Where opportunity is also sought to introduce additional evidence, the evidence to be adduced shall be stated briefly together with reasons for failure to previously adduce said evidence.

On its face, ACE's motion is both untimely and does not meet the standard for reconsideration under N.J.A.C. 14:1-8.6(a). Basically, ACE has presented no errors of law or fact by the Board to support its motion, or any reason to consider its motion at this time.

#### ACE's motion for reconsideration is untimely.

Under N.J.A.C. 14:1-8.6(a), a motion for reconsideration of a Board Order must be filed within 15 days after the effective date of the order. ACE has clearly failed to do so.

ACE's motion conflates the Board's July 2, 2020 Order with its June 7, 2023 Order, asking the Board to "confirm" that ACE may request recovery of its incremental COVID-related costs through its SBC filings. However, neither of those Board Orders, or any other Board Order, authorized the electric utilities to request recovery of their incremental COVID-related costs through their SBC filings. Accordingly, ACE's request for "confirmation" is in fact a request to modify the July 2, 2020 Board Order by adding the SBC proceeding as a third option for it to request recovery of its incremental COVID-related cost claims. A motion asking the Board to reconsider the process it established for handling incremental COVID-related cost claims should have been filed by July 17, 2020. Moreover, there has been no change of material fact warranting the Board's review. As per N.J.A.C. 14:1-8.6, ACE's motion to change the procedures set forth in the July 2, 2020 Board Order is far out of time and should be denied.

### 1. ACE has identified no error of law or fact by the Board to support its motion for reconsideration.

Under N.J.A.C. 14:1-8.6(a), a motion for reconsideration of a Board Order must identify alleged errors of fact or law by the Board to support its motion. ACE has failed to do so,

providing no basis for reconsideration under N.J.A.C. 14:1-8.6(a). Instead, ACE merely asserts

its preference to demand full recovery of all its claimed incremental uncollectibles accrued

during the COVID-19 pandemic through its SBC filing rather than as directed by the Board:

through a filing in this COVID-19 proceeding or in a base rate case. ACE's procedural

preference provides no basis to reconsider the Board Orders of June 7, 2023 or July 2, 2020. In

fact, multiple legal bases support denial of ACE's motion.

First, ACE's motion is contrary to N.J.S.A. 48:3-60, the statute establishing the SBC.

ACE flatly asks the Board to re-write or ignore a critical portion of that statute. To avoid review

of its COVID-related cost claims as contemplated by the July 20, 2020 Order, ACE's motion

proposes to recover 100% of its incremental COVID-related cost claims through its annual SBC

filings, without any Board review of the types or amounts claimed. That argument is contrary to

the express language of the SBC statute. That statute does not guarantee full recovery of claims

for uncollectibles, but authorizes the Board to permit a utility to recover "some or all" of its SBC

cost claims, "as appropriate." The legislature expressly authorized the Board to exercise its

discretion to determine which cost claims are recoverable through the SBC, stating:

[T]he board shall permit each electric public utility and gas public utility to recover <u>some or all</u> of the following costs through a societal benefits charge that shall be collected as a non-bypassable charge imposed on all electric public utility customers and gas public utility customers, as appropriate.

N.J.S.A. 48:3-60(a) (emphases added).

ACE misrepresents the statute as requiring recovery of uncollectibles in the SBC, quoting only a portion of the statute and deleting the critical phrases "some or all" and "as appropriate."

Compare N.J.S.A. 48:3-60(a) with 6/22/23 ACE motion p. 3. The language that ACE omits expressly authorizes the Board to determine the appropriately recoverable portion of uncollectibles in an SBC cost claim. ACE's motion deletes those essential phrases from the statute, and thereby asks the Board to ignore the plain language of the statute and divest itself of its authority to review the recoverability of ACE's SBC claims. Reading the statute as written plainly shows that the statutory language establishing the SBC requires the Board to reject ACE's claim that the Company must recover 100% of its incremental COVID-related cost claims through its annual SBC filings.

Second, the legislature authorizes and requires the Board to set just and reasonable rates in all of its proceedings. N.J.S.A. 48:2-21. Rate setting in this context requires review of ACE's incremental COVID-related uncollectible claims for prudence and other appropriate indicia of recoverability. In fact, in its June 7, 2023 Order, the Board reiterated that a utility's compliance with the filing requirements in that Order "does not guarantee Board approval of requested COVID-19 regulatory asset cost recovery." Id., p. 4.

Well-established principles of administrative law also recognize the Board's discretion to select the procedures that it uses. The Board has done so, directing the utilities to file claims to recover their incremental COVID-19 related costs in either this COVID-19 proceeding or in a base rate case, and to continue to request recovery of their average pre-pandemic level of uncollectibles through an SBC filing.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> See In re Provision of Basic Generation Service for the Period Beginning June 1, 2008, 205 N.J. 339, 347 (2011) (stating New Jersey agencies enjoy great leeway when selecting the procedures and methods to fulfill their statutory mandates).

Third, in addition to its current unsupported motion, ACE has elected to disregard the process for incremental COVID-related cost recovery set forth by the Board in the July 2, 2020 Order. ACE has filed a base rate case,<sup>3</sup> but has not requested its incremental COVID-related costs in that proceeding. ACE also has stated, in writing, its defiance of the July 2, 2020 Board Order in this COVID-19 proceeding, unilaterally asserting its contrary decision not to request its incremental COVID-related costs through a filing under this docket.<sup>4</sup> In addition, ACE's motion is clearly contrary to the July 2, 2020 Board Order governing requests to recover incremental COVID-related costs. That Order directed each utility to file its claim for incremental COVID-related costs either under this COVID-19 docket or in a base rate case. Instead, contrary to the Board's direction, ACE now demands recovery of its entire COVID-related incremental costs, without any Board review for prudence or recoverability, through its annual SBC filing.<sup>5</sup> ACE simply refuses to comply with the Board's direction. This bold claim and its embodiment in this motion must be denied.

#### **CONCLUSION**

ACE's motion is an unsupported attempt to evade Board review of the types of expenses it claims, the amounts of those claims, the return on those amounts, and Board discretion to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> I/M/O The Petition of Atlantic City Electric Company for Approval of Amendments to its Tariff to Provide for an Increase in Rates and Charges for Electric Service Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 48:2-21 and N.J.S.A. 48:2-21.1, and for other Appropriate Relief (2/2023), BPU Docket No. ER23020091.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> In the January 31, 2023 letter from Cynthia L. M. Holland, Esq. to the Board Secretary, ACE declared that it stopped deferring any COVID-19 related expenses to its Board-authorized regulatory asset on Sept. 30, 2021. Instead, ACE stated its position that it will request recovery of all its uncollectible expenses through its SBC filings, instead of in the COVID-19 proceeding or in its base rate case. Rather than offer any legal support for its defiance of the Board's July 2, 2020 Order, ACE supported its non-compliance by citing its own October 1, 2021 and January 12, 2023 Compliance Plans in the COVID-19 proceeding. ACE's current motion relies on the same speciousargument, and must be denied. That January 31, 2023 ACE letter is attached as Exhibit A.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> <u>I/M/O The Petition Of Atlantic City Electric Company To Reconcile And Update The Level Of Its Non-Utility Generation Charge And Its Societal Benefits Charge (2023)</u>, BPU Docket No. ER23020057.

Secretary Sherri Golden June 29, 2023

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allocate a portion of the economic harm from the COVID-19 pandemic to all affected parties.

Since ACE's motion for reconsideration lacks any legal or factual support, has not identified a

single error of law or fact in the June 7, 2023 Board Order, is in any event far out of time, and

contrary the Board's prior orders and the relevant statute, the motion should be denied.

Respectfully submitted,

BRIAN O. LIPMAN, ESQ. DIRECTOR, DIVISION OF RATE COUNSEL

By: /s/ Brían Weeks

Brian Weeks, Esq. Deputy Rate Counsel

c: Service List (via electronic mail)

Cynthia L. M. Holland Assistant General Counsel Exhibit "A"

atlantic city
electric

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January 31, 2023

#### VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

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Acting Secretary of the Board
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**RE:** In the Matter of the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities' Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic BPU Docket No. AO20060471

Dear Acting Secretary Diaz:

Pursuant to an Order Authorizing Establishment of a Regulatory Asset for Incremental COVID-19 Related Expenses (the "Order"), approved and issued by the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (the "Board") on July 2, 2020, New Jersey's regulated utilities were authorized to defer COVID-19-related incremental costs and related offsets into a regulatory asset.

In compliance with the Order and consistent with its terms, Atlantic City Electric Company ("ACE" or the "Company") has tracked such prudently incurred incremental costs and includes the most current quarterly report as **Attachment 1**. Because of the exigencies created by the COVID-19 pandemic, **Attachment 1** is accompanied by a Certification in lieu of an Affidavit of Verification. The individual providing the Certification is a corporate officer of ACE. ACE will continue reporting these relevant costs on a quarterly basis.

As stated in the Compliance Plan filed by the Company on October 1, 2021, the Company stopped deferring COVID-19 related expenditures to the regulatory asset on September 30, 2021. The attached report includes informational data regarding aging of accounts receivable balances, as well as write-off information and number of reconnected customers. Like other uncollectible expenses, the COVID-19-related incremental uncollectible expenses will be addressed in the Company's Societal Benefits Charge ("SBC") update/reconciliation filings and not included in the COVID-19 regulatory asset. As previously reported, the existing balance for ACE is a regulatory

Carmen D. Diaz January 31, 2023 Page 2

liability, which the Company intends to address in its annual SBC filing, anticipated for filing February 1, 2023. Accordingly, it is the Company's position, consistent with its the January 12, 2023 Compliance Plan in this docket, that no additional reporting is required. As such, this January 31 quarterly report will mark the final report filed by ACE unless the Board directs otherwise.

Pursuant to the Order issued by the Board in connection with *In the Matter of the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities' Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic for a Temporary Waiver of Requirements for Certain Non-Essential Obligations*, BPU Docket No. EO20030254, Order dated March 19, 2020, this letter and its attachment(s) are being electronically filed with the Secretary of the Board and the New Jersey Division of Rate Counsel. No paper copies will follow.

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding the above, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia L.M. Holland An Attorney at Law of the State of New Jersey

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Enclosure

cc: Service List

IN THE MATTER OF THE NEW JERSEY BOARD OF PUBLIC UTILITIES' RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC STATE OF NEW JERSEY

BOARD OF PUBLIC UTILITIES

BPU DOCKET NO. AO20060471

#### **CERTIFICATION OF WILLIAM D. MOKOID**

WILLIAM D. MOKOID, of full age, certifies as follows:

- 1. I am the Regional President for Atlantic City Electric Company ("ACE"). In light of the constraints associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, I am submitting this Certification in lieu of Verification in support of ACE's Incremental Costs Report in the above-referenced docket.
- 2. I hereby certify that, as Regional President, I am duly authorized to make this Certification on ACE's behalf.
- 3. I further certify that the information and data contained in the Incremental Costs Report are true and correct to the best of my knowledge, information, and belief.
- 4. I further and finally certify that the foregoing statements made by me are true. I am aware that, if any of the foregoing statements made by me are willfully false, I am subject to punishment.

Dated:  $\frac{3123}{}$ 

WILLIAM D. MOKOID

## Attachment 1

# Atlantic City Electric Company ("ACE") New Jersey COVID-19 - Incremental Costs

Other Data																								
	<u>Feb-20</u>	<u>Mar-20</u>	<u> Apr-20</u>	<u>May-20</u>	<u>Jun-20</u>	<u>Jul-20</u>	<u>Aug-20</u>	<u>Sep-20</u>	Oct-20	Nov-20	<u>Dec-20</u>	<u>Jan-21</u>	<u>Jan-22</u>	<u>Feb-22</u>	<u>Mar-22</u>	<u> Apr-22</u>	<u>May-22</u>	<u>Jun-22</u>	<u>Jul-22</u>	<u>Aug-22</u>	<u>Sep-22</u>	Oct-22	Nov-22	<u>Dec-22</u>
Receivable Aging Data (A/R \$)																								
0-30 Days	49,746,172	42,512,628	44,860,247	35,298,231	44,889,552	82,333,130	93,950,811	83,654,838	55,606,286	50,559,872	60,406,187	68,273,051	73,969,341	62,111,315	53,575,334	52,532,134	42,662,450	66,102,343	92,098,084	97,592,871	97,597,236	67,372,118	56,032,162	59,417,793
31-60 Days	12,746,794	10,884,831	12,521,984	11,749,117	8,480,397	10,110,831	17,636,353	18,770,863	17,985,726	11,865,624	9,465,393	13,898,479	11,659,112	16,124,137	12,106,150	12,310,970	11,833,303	7,320,178	13,702,368	15,725,941	16,208,236	19,345,519	11,726,464	10,023,666
61-90 Days	6,039,013	7,899,478	7,346,620	7,515,076	7,033,467	4,950,589	6,099,837	9,413,128	12,437,450	11,295,547	6,517,737	5,395,039	5,476,479	7,650,371	8,834,244	7,836,548	6,896,887	6,728,646	5,213,260	6,783,800	8,894,755	9,306,566	11,185,709	6,144,666
91-120 Days	3,186,241	4,459,105	6,503,741	5,605,073	5,773,020	5,157,274	4,190,572	4,753,974	7,073,206	9,976,143	9,032,547	4,914,671	6,503,235	4,198,941	6,040,926	7,252,527	6,184,740	5,632,719	5,224,801	3,942,878	5,028,895	7,202,890	7,432,544	8,390,283
121-150 Days	3,102,139	2,474,353	3,957,333	5,639,327	4,674,436	4,637,380	3,843,944	3,476,938	4,033,694	6,221,735	9,098,402	7,512,109	8,116,803	5,798,996	3,934,269	5,372,346	5,789,443	5,498,642	4,997,906	4,336,586	3,381,890	4,040,249	6,273,287	7,027,898
151+ Days	11,728,896	12,078,606	13,300,578	15,723,938	19,432,334	22,098,755	23,658,751	20,260,275	20,378,461	22,329,091	26,045,559	31,113,532	52,280,996	54,385,706	52,314,004	52,136,119	43,131,922	44,484,294	44,705,006	37,826,363	36,554,166	32,605,180	31,852,880	33,250,956
Total	\$ 86,549,255 \$	80,309,001 \$	88,490,503 \$	81,530,762 \$	90,283,206 \$	129,287,959 \$	149,380,268 \$	140,330,015	117,514,824	\$ 112,248,012 \$	120,565,826	\$ 131,106,881 \$	158,005,967 \$	150,269,466 \$	136,804,927 \$	137,440,643	116,498,746 \$	135,766,821 \$	165,941,425	\$ 166,208,438 \$	167,665,178 \$	139,872,521	\$ 124,503,046 \$	124,255,262
0-30 Days 31-60 Days 61-90 Days 91-120 Days 121-150 Days	286,593 48,080 22,545 15,097 12,199	262,687 46,755 25,864 16,270 10,995	271,395 43,494 24,637 17,864 13,014	277,482 40,181 22,213 16,137 13,979	269,352 37,490 18,049 14,393 11,827	282,563 36,180 15,247 10,663 9,839	281,203 46,863 15,787 9,007 7,875	291,839 47,020 20,838 10,036 6,610	277,315 50,602 26,144 13,815 7,899	286,221 43,150 25,522 17,490 10,975	298,231 45,838 18,267 16,830 14,100	302,599 48,988 20,907 10,573 12,356	300,164 43,029 20,877 13,907 10,272	286,523 45,390 19,446 12,624 10,567	274,256 41,023 20,602 12,875 9,712	285,319 43,151 21,016 13,278 9,484	279,777 45,158 21,032 14,614 9,880	295,958 39,633 20,810 13,597 10,682	304,479 46,828 19,895 12,395 10,144	296,170 42,525 18,649 11,301 8,530	296,798 51,760 19,499 12,084 8,248	284,762 51,600 28,670 14,309 9,157	279,102 48,836 28,645 21,184 11,572	281,301 47,059 24,907 18,925 17,488
151+ Days	79,691	82,013	85,163	89,819	94,067	94,986	94,438	84,100	81,884	83,284	87,211	93,251	96,375	97,287	98,804	100,080	91,941	93,437	94,572	88,120	87,806	87,861	89,374	93,198
Total	464,205	444,584	455,567	459,811	445,178	449,478	455,173	460,443	457,659	466,642	480,477	488,674	484,624	471,837	457,272	472,328	462,402	474,117	488,313	465,295	476,195	476,359	478,713	93,198 482,878
Write-Offs Data																								
Note 1 Actual Write-Off	863,626	440,380	(9,359)	(31,937)	(17,390)	125,595	801,213	3,923,101	169,307	14,236	30,212	13,098	9,379,473	714,444	55,168	330,083	2,502,847	858,636	745,365	3,098,991	1,394,563	2,186,182	1,696,275	1,751,243
					(	(	(00.000)	(07.444)	(400.000)	(00 770)	(04.005)	(4.40.00.4)	(4.40, 440)	(400 744)	(4.44.000)	(405.000)	(4.47.040)	(440.405)	(05 500)	(404 470)	(404000)	(4.40.0.44)	(400.000)	100 111
Recoveries	(161,618)	(208,462)	(159,300)	(132,771)	(99,683)	(105,571)	(90,662)	(87,441)	(133,298)	(98,779)	(81,835)	(119,094)	(140,412)	(169,744)	(141,009)	(105,303)	(147,649)	(113,165)	(65,598)	(101,179)	(104,293)	(112,941)	(103,238)	(82,111) 1,669,132

Note 1 Actual Write-offs increase in January 2022 is related primarily to write-offs of inactive accounts only during that month.

32 101 186 213 219

Note 2 Total Write-Offs includes generation.

Cumulative Number of Customers Reconnected

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