



State of New Jersey  
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*Governor*

SHEILA OLIVER  
*Lt. Governor*

STEFANIE A. BRAND  
*Director*

**Via Electronic Mail Only**

May 7, 2020

Ms. Aida Camacho-Welsh, Board Secretary  
New Jersey Board of Public Utilities  
44 South Clinton Avenue, 9<sup>th</sup> Floor  
P.O. Box 350  
Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0350

Re: Petition of Verizon New Jersey Inc. for Waiver of N.J.A.C. § 14:3-5.2 for the  
Period of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency  
**BPU Docket No.: TW20050342**

Dear Board Secretary:

The New Jersey Division of Rate Counsel (“Rate Counsel”) submits the within comments in connection with Verizon New Jersey Inc.’s (“Verizon”) petition requesting approval by the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities’ (“Board”) of a limited and temporary waiver of N.J.A.C. 14:3–5.2 (a)(1) as of March 19, 2020. Rate Counsel submits the within comments for the Board’s consideration. Kindly, acknowledge receipt of this filing electronically for Rate Counsel’s records.<sup>1</sup> For the reasons discussed below, Rate Counsel supports Board approval and other action deemed appropriate and warranted.

Pursuant to N.J.A.C. 14:3–5.2 (a)(1), every public utility is required to maintain a customer service toll free emergency telephone number on a 24-hour, seven days per week basis to ensure customers are able to reach the utility to report service issues and thus ensure the continuation of proper, adequate and safe service to customers. Verizon states that as of March

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<sup>1</sup> Pursuant to the Board’s directives discussed in Miscellaneous Order under Board Docket No. EO20030254, dated March 19, 2020, Rate Counsel is only filing electronically and at this time is not providing ten copies of this filing.

19, 2020, “due to issues resulting from the novel coronavirus (“COVID-19”) pandemic, and in order to protect the health and welfare of its workers pursuant to guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”), the World Health Organization (“WHO”) and state and local authorities, Verizon was compelled to reduce New Jersey call center hours of operation as follows:

**Tech Support:** Monday - Saturday: 8:00 am to 7:00 pm; Sunday: 8:00 am to 5:00 pm (Copper/FTTP voice only);  
Adjusted May 3: Sunday - Saturday 8:00 am to 7:00 pm; and

**Sales & Service:** Monday - Friday: 8:00 am to 5:00 pm;  
Adjusted on March 29: Monday - Saturday: 8:00 am to 5:00 pm;  
Adjusted on April 19: Monday- Friday: 8:00 am to 7:00 pm;  
and Saturday: 8:00 am - 5:00 pm.

Verizon states it expects to be able to return to 24/7 customer service by the end of June 2020.<sup>2</sup>

The Board may relax, waive or suspend enforcement of its regulations during periods of emergency or for other extraordinary events beyond the control of a utility, pursuant to N.J.A.C. 14:10-1A.8, if satisfied that the conditions warrant relaxation, waiver or suspension of a Board regulation. Moreover, in connection with the current public health emergency, Governor Murphy’s Executive Order 103, expressly permits agencies to waive, suspend, or modify any existing rule during this public emergency.<sup>3</sup> Verizon has asserted that the conditions necessitating the temporary waiver sought are beyond its control; the waiver sought is limited in nature and duration; denotes that customers will continue to have access to customer service

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<sup>2</sup> Petition, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Executive Order 103, paragraph 6, p.6, effective immediately, dated March 9, 2020.

Board Secretary, Letter  
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representatives and that Verizon will return to full compliance with the requirements of N.J.A.C. 14:3–5.2(a)(1) possibly by the end of June 2020.

Rate Counsel relies on the assertions provided by Verizon that the limited and temporary adjustment to call center hours resulting from circumstances that were beyond Verizon’s control as a result of the public health emergency arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and that the emergent actions taken by Verizon as of March 19, 2020, without first seeking Board approval of its actions were necessary in order to protect the health and safety of its workers and did not detrimentally harm its’ customers or affect the overall provision of safe and reliable service to New Jersey customers. Accordingly, Rate Counsel supports the action the Board deems appropriate and warranted in this matter. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments and for your attention to this matter.

Very truly yours,

STEFANIE A. BRAND, ESQ.  
DIRECTOR  
NJ DIVISION OF RATE COUNSEL

*/s/ Maria T. Novas-Ruiz*

MNR/td  
c: Service List

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