

**STATE OF RHODE ISLAND
PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION**

IN RE: THE NARRAGANSETT ELECTRIC : DOCKET NO.: 25-21-GE
COMPANY D/B/A RHODE ISLAND ENERGY'S :
REQUEST TO TERMINATE REQUIREMENTS :
RELATED TO EXTENDED PAYMENT PLANS :

ORDER

This matter is before the Public Utilities Commission (Commission) upon The Narragansett Electric Company d/b/a Rhode Island Energy's (Company) request to terminate requirements related to extended payment plans put in place during the Covid-19 emergency.¹

I. Background

On March 9, 2020, Governor Gina Raimondo declared a state of emergency due to the Covid-19 pandemic.² In response, the Commission ordered electric, natural gas, water, and sewer utilities to immediately cease collections activities and terminations of service.³ The Commission further encouraged utilities to offer flexible payment plans to all customers facing financial hardship.⁴ With respect to the Company specifically, the Commission ordered that any residential customer whose service had been terminated or who had a termination date scheduled was entitled to have service restored upon an upfront payment equal to 10% of the unpaid balance owed, with the remainder to be paid over 18, 24, or 36 months, depending on the amount of the remaining unpaid balance.⁵ The Commission extended its directives multiple times, and in an Order dated July 15, 2020, it required the Company to offer extended payment plans to all residential customers, in addition to other flexible and sensible payment options.⁶

¹ All filings submitted in this matter can be accessed on the Commission's website at <https://ripuc.ri.gov/Docket-25-21-GE> or at its offices at 89 Jefferson Boulevard, Warwick, RI during regular business hours.

² Executive Order No. 20-02 (Mar. 9, 2020).

³ Order No. 23786 (Mar. 17, 2020).

⁴ *Id.* at 2.

⁵ *Id.* at 4.

⁶ Order No. 23866, at 5 (July 15, 2020).

The Company filed the instant motion to terminate the requirements to offer extended payment plans on June 19, 2025.⁷ If the Company's motion is granted, the Company will stop offering extended payment plans and revert to offering payment plans under the Commission's Rules and Regulations Governing the Termination of Electric, Gas and Water Utility Service (Termination Rules), codified at 810-RICR-10-00-1.⁸ The payment plans offered under the Termination Rules differ between "Standard" and "Protected Status" customers, but generally have larger down payment requirements with shorter repayment timeframes when compared to the extended payment plans. A residential customer who is now on an extended payment plan will remain so as long as he or she remains current on the plan. The Company has stated it will offer other flexible payment arrangements as it deems appropriate under the circumstances, as well as other customer assistance initiatives, including "budget billing," the Arrearage Management Program, and other state and federal assistance programs.⁹

II. Company's Motion and Filings by the George Wiley Center and Division of Public Utilities and Carriers

As grounds for terminating the requirements to offer extended payment plans, the Company first argued that the Covid-19 emergency has ended. The Company noted that Rhode Island's state of emergency was extended through May 11, 2023, with no further extensions.¹⁰

Secondly, the Company asserted that the extended payment plan requirements are contributing to higher unpaid balances for customers and increased arrearages for the Company.¹¹ The Company stated that customers who default on an extended payment plan can indefinitely reenroll in new plans upon paying 10% of the unpaid balance, at which point the balance may

⁷ See generally Company's Filing (June 19, 2025).

⁸ See generally 810-RICR-10-00-1.

⁹ Company's Filing, at 8-9, 13.

¹⁰ *Id.* at 10.

¹¹ *Id.* at 10-11.

grow to a level where customers cannot pay it off, leading to higher uncollectible accounts for the Company.¹² The Company provided summary statistics showing that of the 8,343 accounts who have enrolled in an extended payment plan, 6,687 of them (about 80%) have defaulted.¹³ The Company also provided data showing the dollar value of delinquent electric and gas accounts, which have increased from about \$124 million in January of 2022 to about \$254 million in May of 2025.¹⁴ The Company argued that reverting back to payment plans under the Termination Rules will encourage customers to pay down higher balances and minimize growing arrears.¹⁵

On June 30, 2025, the George Wiley Center filed an objection to the Company's motion.¹⁶ The George Wiley Center conceded that the economic disruption caused by Covid-19 was no longer a consideration, however it expressed a concern that if the Company's motion is granted, it is unlikely that customers who struggle to remain current on extended payment plans can meet the steeper requirements under the Termination Rules, leading to additional service terminations.¹⁷ It also noted that potential conflict in the Middle East could lead to higher volatility in global energy markets and emphasized the need for caution regarding actions which may make it more difficult for customers to keep their utility services active.¹⁸

The George Wiley Center asked that the Commission consider ordering the Company to allow for repayment plans like those offered in Docket No. 1725.¹⁹ For context, in Docket No. 1725, the Commission implemented modified payment plans for a period running from the late

¹² *Id.* at 13.

¹³ *Id.* at 14, Table 1.

¹⁴ Company's Filing, Attachment 1; *see also* Company's Response to PUC 1-5 (Aug. 4, 2025).

¹⁵ *Id.* at 14.

¹⁶ The George Wiley Center subsequently moved to intervene on August 15, 2025. The Company did not file an objection to the George Wiley Center's motion.

¹⁷ George Wiley Center's Obj., at 2 (June 30, 2025).

¹⁸ *Id.* at 2-3.

¹⁹ *Id.* at 3.

fall through the early winter upon annual motions by the George Wiley Center.²⁰ Customers could enroll in a modified payment plan with a 10% upfront payment, but had to have either (1) not participated in a modified payment plan in a prior year, or (2) did participate in a prior year, but had a balance less than or equal to their balances from that prior year.²¹

On September 18, 2025, the Division of Public Utilities and Carriers (Division) filed its position memorandum, which indicated no opposition to the Company's motion. Like the George Wiley Center, the Division also recommended that the Commission continue to afford customers modified payment plans approved in Docket No. 1725.²²

III. Discovery and Public Comment Hearing

A. *Discovery*

During the pendency of this docket, the Commission propounded one set of Data Requests, and the Division also issued one set. This Order will not discuss every query made or issue investigated, but will highlight certain relevant portions bearing on the Commission's decision. All responses are available on the Commission's website.

The Company cited numerous factors that caused or contributed to the increase in arrearages, which include but are not limited to (1) *Bennett* protections, which shielded about 5,400 customers from collections and terminations until August 2023;²³ (2) Covid-19-related suspension of collections for residential and protected customers until late 2022 and 2023; (3) suspension of collections stemming from the cutover from National Grid to Rhode Island

²⁰ See generally Docket No. 1725.

²¹ See Order No. 23697, at 5-6 (Oct. 18, 2019). The Company noted in its motion that the current extended payment plan scheme does not set the same conditions for participation like in Docket No. 1725, meaning that customers who default on an extended payment plan can enroll in a new one upon payment of a 10% deposit without ever paying down the outstanding balance. Company's Filing, at 13. The Company noted that it was not opposed to implementing modified payment plans if they are on a short-term basis to address specific public safety concerns (e.g., winter rates) and contain historical conditions for participation. *Id.* at 12 n.23.

²² Division's Position Mem. (Sept. 18, 2025).

²³ See generally Consent Order, *Bennett v. Ahern*, C.A. No. PC-15-4214 (Apr. 26, 2016).

Energy systems; (4) annual winter moratoria on utility service terminations;²⁴ and (5) higher winter rates and colder recent winters.²⁵ The Company also pointed to several bouts of arrearage forgiveness and credits, which reduced customers' immediate payment obligations but did not address the Company's existing arrearages.²⁶

B. Public Comment Hearing

The Commission held a hearing on September 9, 2025 to accept public comment on the Company's motion. The Commission specifically sought public comment on the following questions: (1) whether the emergency identified in support of offering extended payment plans has expired; and (2) if so, whether the requirements to offer extended payment plans should be terminated on or before December 1, 2025, which is thirty days after the beginning of the Termination Rules' termination moratorium period. The Commission heard from multiple members of the public who were concerned about high energy costs and the timing of terminating extended payment plans at the same time as instituting winter Last Resort Service rates.

IV. Decision

The Commission has two issues before it in this docket: (1) has the Covid-19 emergency expired, thereby obviating the need for offering extended payment plans; and (2) if the Covid-19 emergency has expired, when the requirements to offer extended payment plans should terminate.

Consistent with the stated positions of the parties, the Commission finds that the Covid-19 emergency has ended, thereby obviating the Company's requirement to offer extended payment

²⁴ For context, the utility termination moratorium period runs from November 1 through May 1 annually. Gas and electric public utilities cannot terminate residential service during this period for nonpayment of a delinquent account if the customer is a "Protected Status" customer. See 810-RICR-10-00-1.8(E).

²⁵ See Company's Responses to DIV 1-3, 1-4 (Sept. 2, 2025).

²⁶ The Company also noted that it anticipates giving additional "Hold Harmless" credits during the months of January, February, and March of 2026 and 2027. The Company stated that these credits may help mitigate future arrears, but again do not address existing arrearages. See Company's Response to DIV 1-4. The Company's proposed "Hold Harmless" credits are currently under investigation in Docket No. 25-33-GE.

plans. The extended payment plans in question were intended to be a temporary reprieve to preserve public safety.²⁷ The Commission notes that the economic and lifestyle disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic are no longer prevalent, and that Rhode Island has not been in a state of emergency since May 11, 2023. Accordingly, the Commission finds no basis to continue requiring the Company to offer extended payment plans to customers.

The Commission understands that customers have relied on extended payment plans for over five years, and that an immediate transition to the Termination Rules could cause significant disruption and financial distress for customers. The Commission is pleased to see that the Company, the George Wiley Center, and the Division appear to agree that some form of “soft landing” by way of a transition to pre-Covid modified payment plans may be appropriate.

However, the Commission is concerned that practical difficulties may arise by transitioning from the current extended payment plans to the pre-Covid ones. Additionally, the pre-Covid modified payment plans (in 2018 and 2019) ran through to December 31,²⁸ meaning that even if the Commission were to reintroduce modified payment plans, they would only be active for a brief period, which may cause unnecessary administrative complications and confusion for customers. The Commission therefore finds that the most practical approach is to continue the Covid-era extended payment plans through to December 31, 2025, after which time the Commission’s Termination Rules would take effect. This approach would allow sufficient time for customers to enroll in an extended payment plan, guarantee administrative continuity, and set a definitive date at which the Company can begin addressing its arrearages.

At an Open Meeting held on September 25, 2025, the Commission made and approved motions consistent with this Order.

²⁷ See generally Order No. 23786.

²⁸ See generally Order Nos. 23697 (Oct. 18, 2019), 23312 (Nov. 1, 2018).

Accordingly, it is hereby:

(25525) ORDERED:

1. The Covid-19 emergency necessitating the Company to offer extended payment plans, as ordered in Docket No. 5022, has ended.
2. The Company's requirement to offer extended payment plans, as ordered in Docket No. 5022, is terminated effective December 31, 2025, and that the payment plans as described in the PUC's Termination Rules shall take effect January 1, 2026.

EFFECTIVE AT WARWICK, RHODE ISLAND ON SEPTEMBER 25, 2025
PURSUANT TO AN OPEN MEETING DECISION ON SEPTEMBER 25, 2025. WRITTEN
ORDER ISSUED SEPTEMBER 30, 2025.

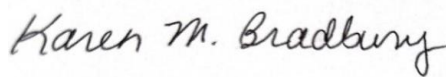
PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION



Ronald T. Gerwatowski, Chairman



Abigail Anthony, Commissioner



Karen M. Bradbury, Commissioner

NOTICE OF RIGHT OF APPEAL: Pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws § 39-5-1, any person aggrieved by a decision or order of the Commission may, within seven days from the date of the decision or order, petition the Supreme Court for a writ of certiorari to review the legality and reasonableness of the decision or order.