

**STATE OF RHODE ISLAND
PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION**

IN RE: THE NARRAGANSETT ELECTRIC COMPANY :
d/b/a RHODE ISLAND ENERGY’S PROPOSALS TO :
PROVIDE PROTECTIONS TO CERTAIN CUSTOMERS : **DOCKET NO. 1725**
DURING THE PENDENCY OF THE CURRENT FEDERAL :
GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN :

ORDER

In response to a request from Rhode Island Speaker of the House Speaker K. Joseph Shekarchi, seeking protections for certain federal workers in light of the ongoing federal government shutdown, on October 24, 2025, The Narragansett Electric Company d/b/a Rhode Island Energy (Company) filed a letter with the Public Utilities Commission (Commission) proposing to: (1) commence the winter moratorium protection from termination of gas and electric service to Rhode Island residential customers to begin effective Monday, October 27, 2025; and (2) that active military personnel, federal employees, and government contractors directly impacted by the current federal government shutdown (impacted workers) be recognized as eligible for a payment hold on their accounts during the pendency of that shutdown, without the imposition of a penalty and without the threat of service termination.¹

The federal government has been shut down since October 1, 2025. Many federal workers have either been furloughed or are working without pay. According to various news reports, on October 24, 2025, federal workers who would normally have been paid, received no pay. While furloughed workers may be eligible for unemployment benefits, those working without pay are not.² Active military were paid on October 15, 2025, but October 31, 2025, could result in no pay

¹ Cornett Letter (Oct. 24, 2025).

² Cerullo, Megan, *Federal workers hunker down as they go without pay in shutdown: "Protect every penny"* (Oct. 24, 2025); <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/government-shutdown-federal-workers-missing-paycheck-2025/>.

for those workers either.³ This is the second longest federal government shutdown, with the longest being approximately 35 days in 2018 and 2019. That shutdown occurred entirely during the winter utility moratorium period.⁴

The PUC's Rules and Regulations Governing the Termination of Residential Electric, Gas, and Water Utility Service define the "utility termination moratorium period" as the period of time between 12:01 a.m. on November 1st and 11:59 p.m. on May 1st of each year.⁵ The Company's proposal would start the moratorium on October 27, 2025. Next, not all residential customers are eligible for protection from the service termination during the utility termination moratorium period which only applies to those qualified as "Protected Status Customers" or non-protected customers with a delinquent balance below \$500 (heat source) or \$200 (non-heat source). One of the qualifications for "Protected Status" is that a customer is receiving unemployment compensation. However, as noted above, federal workers who have not been furloughed may be working without a paycheck and would not qualify. Furthermore, until a period of time passes, the impacted workers may not qualify for the other categories of "Protected Status."⁶ The Company's proposal, therefore, would create a new classification for impacted workers during the pendency of the current federal government shutdown. Namely, they would be protected from shutoff upon providing appropriate attestation of their qualification for the protection.

In response to the Company's proposal, the Commission posted an emergency open meeting to be held on October 27, 2025. The notice of open meeting was not made within 48 business hours of the meeting. Therefore, the Commission first voted that the open meeting is

³ Till, Aaron and Hernandez, Frederick, *Who Is Missing Paychecks in the 2025 Shutdown—When and Where?* (Oct. 24, 2025); <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/explainer/who-is-missing-paychecks-in-the-2025-shutdown-when-and-where/>.

⁴ Roberts, Gillian and Iyer, Kaanita, *The last government shutdown was the longest in nearly 50 years. Here are all the recent shutdowns in one chart* (Oct. 21, 2025); <https://www.cnn.com/politics/longest-government-shutdown-vis>

⁵ 810-RICR-10-00-1.2.A.

⁶ Financial Hardship, or 75% or below state median income, is not a category for special protection from shutoffs. Instead, it is a classification that allows for more tiers of payment plans.

deemed necessary to address an unexpected occurrence that requires immediate action to protect the public. The Company's proposal is to commence the special protections three days after its Friday filing. Thus, the Company is seeking to confirm its authority immediately. A delay in Commission action on the Company's request would cause uncertainty and may lead to service terminations for customers who would otherwise be protected under the pending proposal.

Next, the Commission found that public safety requires the Commission to act immediately to avoid irreparable injury to the public interest. While this may seem similar to the prior vote, the first decision was necessary to hold the emergency open meeting. This decision is necessary under R.I. Gen. Laws § 39-1-32 to allow the Commission to act without conducting further process such as soliciting comments or proposing new rules, both of which would delay a Commission decision. The Commission recognized the exigent circumstances and temporary gap in the Commission's Termination Rules to address this uncommon situation.

Next, the Commission found that the Company's proposal to commence the winter moratorium on shutoffs on October 27, 2025 for all of its residential customers is reasonable, particularly given the fact that it is, in effect, only four days early.⁷ To be clear, this will apply to all Rhode Island Energy residential customers, even those with active termination dates and those who would otherwise not be eligible for protections so as to allow impacted workers the opportunity to identify themselves to the Company for protection.

Then, the Commission found the Company's proposal to treat impacted workers who might otherwise not qualify for protection from shutoff during the winter moratorium be afforded those protections for the duration of the federal government shutdown upon providing satisfactory evidence that they are affected is reasonable. The Termination Rules act as a minimum set of

⁷ Shutoffs are not allowed on Fridays.

requirements to be followed by public utilities. Thus, the Company's proposal to create a new temporary set of specific residential customer protections in response to an uncommon situation is not inconsistent with the intent of the Termination Rules. Therefore, impacted workers who are directly impacted by the current federal government shutdown are encouraged to immediately contact the Company to identify themselves and learn how to complete the self-attestation form and provide any necessary documentation.

As with prior orders allowing protections from terminations, these protections have the potential to cause their own difficult situations. Customers who may have the means are encouraged to make even minimal payments during this uncertain period in order to avoid unmanageable balances at the end of the protection period. If possible, customers may want to investigate budget billing plans in order to spread higher winter billings over a twelve-month period. Either way, all customers experiencing financial challenges are encouraged to contact the Company to learn whether they may be eligible for various payment arrangements or the discounted rate classes.

Accordingly, it is hereby,

(25549) ORDERED:

1. The open meeting on November 1, 2025 at 10:55 A.M. is deemed necessary to address an unexpected occurrence that requires immediate action to protect the public.
2. Public safety requires the Commission to act immediately to avoid irreparable injury to the public interest.
3. The Narragansett Electric Company d/b/a Rhode Island Energy's proposal to commence the winter moratorium on shutoffs effective October 27, 2025 for all residential customers is reasonable and is hereby approved.
4. The Narragansett Electric Company d/b/a Rhode Island Energy's proposal that active military personnel, federal employees, and government contractors directly impacted by the current federal government shutdown be recognized as eligible for a payment hold on their accounts during the pendency of that shutdown, without the imposition of a penalty and without the threat of service termination is reasonable and is hereby approved.
5. This Order will expire commensurate with the re-opening of the federal government.

EFFECTIVE AT WARWICK, RHODE ISLAND ON OCTOBER 27, 2025 PURSUANT TO AN OPEN MEETING DECISION ON OCTOBER 27, 2025. WRITTEN ORDER ISSUED ON NOVEMBER 3, 2025.



PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

Ronald T. Gerwatowski

Ronald T. Gerwatowski, Chairman

Abigail Anthony

Abigail Anthony, Commissioner

Karen M. Bradbury

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 PUC may, within seven (7) days from the date of the order, petition the Supreme Court for a Writ of Certiorari to review the legality and reasonableness of the decision or order.