

**UNITIL ENERGY SYSTEMS, INC.**

**DIRECT TESTIMONY OF  
SARA M. SANKOWICH**

**EXHIBIT SMS-1**

**New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission**

**Docket No. DE 18-xxx**

**March 15, 2018**

1 **I. INTRODUCTION**

2 **Q. Please state your name and business address.**

3 A. My name is Sara M. Sankowich. My business address is 6 Liberty Lane West,  
4 Hampton, New Hampshire 03842.

5 **Q. What is your position and what are your responsibilities?**

6 A. I am the System Arborist of Unitil Service Corp., which provides centralized utility  
7 management services to Unitil Corporation's utility operating subsidiaries, including  
8 Unitil Energy Systems, Inc. ("Unitil Energy" or "the Company"). My primary  
9 responsibility is the electric operations vegetation management program.

10 **Q. Please describe your business and educational background.**

11 A. I have over 16 years of professional experience in the utility industry with an extensive  
12 background utility vegetation management. I joined Unitil Service Corp. in 2011 as the  
13 System Arborist. Prior to joining Unitil Corporation, I was employed for six years at  
14 National Grid where I advanced through positions in utility vegetation management.  
15 The last position I held with National Grid prior to joining Unitil was that of Manager,  
16 Vegetation Management Strategy. Prior to National Grid I held a utility arborist  
17 position with Orange & Rockland Utilities, and a position with Northern Indiana Public  
18 Service Company as a consultant through Environmental Consultants Inc. I hold a  
19 Bachelor of Science degree in Forestry Resource Management from the State  
20 University of New York, College of Environmental Science and Forestry.

1 **Q. Do you have any certifications that qualify you to speak to issues related to**  
2 **vegetation management?**

3 A. Yes. I am a Certified Arborist through the International Society of Arboriculture.

4 **Q. Have you previously testified or submitted testimony before the New Hampshire**  
5 **Public Utilities Commission (“Commission”), or other regulatory agencies?**

6 A. Yes, I have appeared previously as an expert witness or submitted testimony before the  
7 Commission in several dockets, and have also testified before the Massachusetts  
8 Department of Public Utilities in proceedings relating to vegetation management.

9 **Q. What is the purpose of your testimony?**

10 A. The purpose of my testimony is to present and support the Company’s proposal to  
11 accelerate its Storm Resiliency Program (“SRP”) by one year, completing an additional  
12 one-third mileage during 2018, 2019, and 2020. This would increase spending by  
13 \$474,333 for these three years, bringing the total SRP spend for each of these years to  
14 \$1,897,333. After 2020, we would return to the current SRP spending level.

15 **Q. Please describe the SRP.**

16 A. The SRP is a companion program to the Company’s comprehensive vegetation  
17 management program (“VMP”), aimed at reducing tree exposure along select circuits in  
18 order to improve performance during major and minor storm events. The goal of the  
19 SRP is to reduce tree-related incidents, resulting customer interruptions, and more  
20 significantly, resulting municipality impact along critical portions of targeted lines in  
21 minor and major weather events. In turn, the Company aims to reduce the overall cost  
22 of storm preparation and response, improve restoration, and preserve municipal critical  
23 infrastructure for the purpose of enhancing public health and safety. The Company is

1 proposing a one year acceleration of the SRP in order to move up and realize these  
2 benefits of reduced tree exposure along electric overhead lines and the reduce the  
3 overall cost of storm preparation and response, and improve system performance during  
4 major storm events.

5 **Q. Have you performed any studies or analyses that demonstrate that the SRP is**  
6 **achieving its goals?**

7 A. Yes. The Company's 2018 REP and VMP Annual Report, filed with the Commission  
8 on March 15, 2018, under separate cover, contains an analysis of the SRP program and  
9 provides support for the request to accelerate the program. It is difficult to prove or to  
10 quantify, however, what might have happened had the Company not undertaken the  
11 SRP. By trending storm data over the past several years, I believe there is sufficient  
12 empirical evidence to conclude that the program is meeting its stated objectives. Those  
13 objectives include improvement of the reliability of treated circuits out to the first  
14 protected device; reduction of the cost of storms by shortening the restoration time and  
15 needing fewer resources needed to accomplish the restoration; and enhancing customer  
16 relations by improving power availability during events that previously caused power  
17 interruptions.

18 **Q. Are ther other benefits that are being realized by the Company as a result of the**  
19 **SRP?**

20 A. Yes. In addition to the cost and resource trends in major storms, there is evidence of  
21 decline in outages under normal conditions and as a result of minor storms. This can be  
22 seen by studying the sections of circuit where the SRP has been performed. This too is  
23 discussed in the 2018 REP and VMP Report.

1 **Q. What is the rate impact to customers of the proposed acceleration of the program**  
2 **by one year?**

3 A. There is no additional cost to customers as the incremental costs that the Company  
4 seeks to recover in years 2018-2020 would be incurred in 2021 if we keep the program  
5 on its current schedule. The acceleration would have a minimal bill impact on a per  
6 customer basis, as an average customer would see an increase of only \$0.24 per month.  
7 By moving the program up by one year, we expect that the reduction in customer  
8 outages, interruptions and restoration costs that would be realized as a result of the work  
9 scheduled for 2021 will be realized sooner, during the 2018-2020 time frame.

10 **Q. Does this conclude your testimony?**

11 A. Yes, it does.