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June 9, 2023

Daniel C Goldner, Chairman New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission 21 South Fruit Street Concord, NH 03301-2429

Re: DE 23-002, UNITIL ENERGY SYSTEMS, INC., Proposed Purchase of Receivables Program

CPCNH Petition to Intervene

Dear Chair Goldner,

Attached for filing, please find the Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire's Testimony in this matter.

Pursuant to current PUC policy this is only being filed electronically.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me. Thank you.

Yours truly,

Clifton Below

Chair, CPCNH, (603) 448-5899, Clifton.Below@CPCNH.org

THE STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISISON

DE 23-002

Unitil Energy Systems, Inc.

Proposed Purchase of Receivables Program

Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire

Testimony of Clifton C. Below

June 9, 2023

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Att. Coalition-2 - CPCNH 1-7 Data response, including CPCNH 1-7 Attachment 1

Att. Coalition-3 – DOE 1-8 Data response

I. Introduction

1 Q. Please state your name, business address and position with regard to the docket.

2 A. My name is Clifton C. Below and my office address is 1 Court Street, Suite 300,

3 Lebanon, NH 03766. I serve as Chair of the Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire

4 (CPCNH or the "Coalition"), a non-profit corporation operating as a governmental

5 instrumentality of 34 subdivisions of the State of New Hampshire¹ pursuant to RSA 53-A and

6 RSA 53-E. I am also Assistant Mayor of the City of Lebanon and represent the City on the Board

7 of Directors of CPCNH, all of which I do on a volunteer basis.

8 Q. Please describe your educational and related professional experience.

9 A. A detailed statement of my background can be found on pp. 1-3 and in my direct

10 testimony in DE 16-576 and Attachment A thereto.² I will only highlight a few keys elements

11 here. I earned my B.A. from Dartmouth College in 1980 where I graduated with distinction in

12 my Geography and Environmental Studies major. During my tenure as a State Representative

13 from 1992-1998 I served on the House Science, Technology, and Energy Committee where I

14 was heavily involved in energy and regulatory legislation. For example, as Chair of the Policy

15 Principles, Social and Environmental Issues Subcommittee of the Retail Wheeling and

16 Restructuring Study Committee in 1995 I facilitated a consensus building legislative and

17 stakeholder process that resulted in recommended "Restructuring Policy Principles" that

¹ City of Lebanon, Town of Hanover, City of Nashua, Cheshire County, Town of Harrisville, Town of Exeter, Town of Rye, City of Dover, Town of Warner, Town of Walpole, Town of Plainfield, Town of Newmarket, Town of Enfield, Town of Durham, Town of Pembroke, Town of Hudson, Town of Webster, Town of New London, City of Portsmouth, Town of Peterborough, Town of Canterbury, Town of Wilmot, Town of Sugar Hill, Town of Hancock, Town of Westmoreland, Town of Shelburne, Town of Brentwood, Town of Boscawen, City of Berlin, Town of Randolph, Town of Lyme, Town of Rollinsford, Town of Stratham and Town of Newport.

² Found at: <u>https://www.puc.nh.gov/Regulatory/Docketbk/2016/16-576/TESTIMONY/16-576_2016-10-24_LEBANON_DTESTIMONY_C_BELOW.PDF</u> and <u>https://www.puc.nh.gov/Regulatory/Docketbk/2016/16-576/TESTIMONY/16-576_2016-10-24_LEBANON_ATT_DTESTIMONY_C_BELOW.PDF</u>.

1 became the core of NH's Electric Utility Restructuring statute, RSA 374-F. I also was involved 2 in the original passage of legislation creating RSA 53-E in 1996. In 1998 I was elected to the 3 NH Senate and from 1997-2004 I served on the Advisory Council on Energy of the National 4 Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), including 3 years as Chair, which advised NCSL on 5 emerging energy issues. I also served as a member of the National Council on Electricity 6 Policy Steering Committee from 2001-2004, which was a policy collaborative with NARUC, 7 NGA, and NASEO. 8 In late 2005 I was appointed to serve as a NH PUC Commissioner with my tenure 9 ending in February 2012. I served in a variety of capacities during that time, including a year 10 as President of New England Conference of Public Utility Commissioners. 11 More recently I also fully participated in the PUC's Grid Modernization Working 12 Group in IR 15-295 and in DE 16-576 on behalf of the City of Lebanon when work began on the development of Lebanon Community Power (LCP) pursuant to RSA 53-E. Subsequently I 13 was involved with the drafting and passage of Chapter 316, NH Laws of 2019³ and the 14 15 compromise on 2021 HB 315 that became Chapter 229, NH Laws of 2021⁴. I also helped 16 develop the administrative rules proposed in DRM 21-142 that became the basis for the Puc 17 2200 rules. 18 Have you previously testified before this Commission? Q.

A. Yes, I provided written and sometimes live testimony in DE 16-576, DE 17-189, DE 19064, DE 19-197, and DE 20-170, all on behalf of the City of Lebanon.

³ <u>https://gencourt.state.nh.us/bill_status/legacy/bs2016/</u>

⁴ <u>https://gencourt.state.nh.us/bill_status/legacy/bs2016/</u>

1 II. CPCNH Position on Unitil Proposal as Presented in their Testimony.

2 Q. What has been your involvement in this proceeding?

A. I have read all of the testimony and comment filed to date, as well as all of the data
responses, submitted one set of data requests, and participated in the one technical session to
date.

6 Q. What is CPCNH's position on the proposal?

7 A. CPCNH generally supports the overall proposal as presented in Unitil's prefiled 8 testimony and finds that the proposal is consistent with RSA 53-E:9 and Puc 2205.16(e). We 9 do take issue with one particular aspect of the proposal, which is the proposed payment date to 10 suppliers of the last business day of the month following the month following the month in 11 which retail customers are invoiced for generation supply services. We also have serious 12 concerns about potential tariff and supplier agreement language that Unitil has provided on an 13 initial basis in response to a data request, but which has not appeared in testimony yet. These 14 concerns are addressed below.

Q. What is the concern with Unitil's proposed payment to suppliers of Accounts
 Receivable Purchase Price on the last day of month following billing to retail customer?

A. The first concern is that Unitil, together with other utilities if this was applied to all
Purchase of Receivables (POR) programs, would have use of millions of dollars beyond their
average lag in receipt of funds and the supplier would have to carry that additional cost of
working capital beyond the average lag in customer payments. This could financially
advantage utility default service supply compared with supply by CEPS or Community Power
alternative default service, because this proposed date extends beyond the average lag in

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1 customer payments by close to 5 days on average. Unitil has indicated that their average lag in 2 receipt of customer payments from the date the customer is billed is 40.7 days. See CPCNH 1-3 3, Attachment Coalition-1. The last business day of the month following invoice represents 4 close to 5 additional days that payment to the supplier would lag beyond Unitil's average 5 receipt of payments from customer. For CPCNH that cost across all 3 utilities could be on the 6 order of \$500,000 to \$700,000/year. 7 0. How do figure this potential cost of such an additional lag between utility receipt 8 of payment and payment of the AR Purchase Price to CPCNH? 9 A. Across the three investor-owned electric utilities in NH, CPCNH will have about 10 76,000 retail customers with a total annual load currently estimated at about 622,500 MWh. 11 For illustration sake assume either a retail rate of \$0.10/kWh or \$0.15/kWh. That would result in gross revenue (before the POR discount) of about \$62,2250,000 to \$93,374,000/year. 12 13 Assuming a 5% prime rate as a proxy for the cost of working capital, which is 0.5% lower than 14 the current prime rate that is used for customer deposits and past due amounts and other 15 purposes pursuant to Puc 1202.13 and as seen in CPCNH 1-7, Attachment Coalition-2, then the 16 total value of use or delay in receipt of those receivables is approximately \$8,527 to \$12,791 17 per day at the retail supply rates indicated. The number of days that payment of the AR 18 Purchase Price would be delayed compared to utility receipt of customer payments would be 19 about 54.76 days/year, resulting in a total cost of \$467,000 to \$700,000/year. 20 0. How do you figure the lag in payment to the supplier being about 54.76 days/year? 21 On average there are 365.23 days/year, so an average of 30.44 days/month. Assuming A. 22 that customers invoices for the prior month are evenly distributed between the first and last

halves of the prior month then the average invoice date is 15.22 days before the end of the

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1 average month, so when added to average length of a month of 30.44 days, then the average 2 lag between the customer billing and payment of the AR Purchase Price would be 45.68 days. 3 Subtracting the average customer payment lag from billing of 40.70 days for Unitil, assuming 4 comparable lags and payment delays for other utilities, results in an additional lag between 5 customer payments and supplier payments of 4.98 days/month. That times 12 months/year 6 results in a total of 59.76 days of lagging payments to the supplier. However, that is not quite 7 accurate because Unitil is proposing payments to suppliers on the last business day of the 8 month, which, on average will be earlier because about 2/7 of the time the last business day of 9 the month will be 1 or 2 days earlier than the last day of the month due to weekends. Taking 10 2023 as an illustrative year -- the last business day of the month was 2 days earlier in April and 11 will be 1 day earlier in September and 2 days earlier in December, so a total of 5 days earlier, 12 resulting in about 54.76 days/year of additional lag between utility receipt of customer 13 payments and utility payment to the supplier for the accounts receivable purchase price.

14 Q. What other concerns does CPCNH have with using the last business day of the

15 month for supplier payments?

16 There are two concerns: 1) there is no leeway for errors to be corrected before the close A. 17 of the month; and 2) there is no leeway for the supplier to use those funds for payments that are 18 due or that supplier desires to make before the end of month and potentially the end of a 19 calendar or fiscal year. There could be an error in the amount of the payment or the account 20 that it is sent to, that an extra business day or two in a month may allow resolution for. Also, 21 sometimes if an amount is transferred out late in a day it may not be recorded in the receiving 22 account until the next business day. If that occurred on the last business day of a fiscal year it 23 could create unnecessary accounting, financial reporting, and audit issues.

1 Q. What alternatives does CPCNH propose?

- A. There are at least 3 alternative that could resolves these concerns, individually or
 together:
 1) Payments could be required on the 2nd or 3rd to last business day of the month,
- 5 which would more closely align with Unitil's current customer payment lag.
- 6 2) Interest could be credited (or charged) to the POR reconciliation account at the Puc
- 7 1202.13 prime interest rate for the difference between customer payment lag and supplier
- 8 payment lag (or lead).
- 9 3) AR Purchase Price payments could be made to suppliers on the same average lag
- 10 time as customer payments, as Eversource has proposed and as their POR tariffs provide for in
- 11 Massachusetts which state under "Timing of Payment to Competitive Supplier":
- 12 "Unless otherwise ordered by the MDPU, the average payment period shall be based on
- 13 actual historical data for the most recent 12-month period for which data is available in the
- 14 relevant classification, or other appropriate period, as approved by the MDPU."⁵
- 15 III. Concerns about potential tariff and supplier agreement language.
- 16 Q. What are CPCNH's concerns about Unitil's proposed tariff and supplier
- 17 agreement edits to enable POR
- 18 A. There are 3 concerns. First, in general, the proposed text of changes to their tariff and
- 19 supplier agreement were not proposed in their testimony but were provided in response to DOE
- 20 1-8. Second, the proposed edits, while ostensibly only for the purpose of "showing changes to

⁵ From this webpage: <u>https://www.eversource.com/content/business/account-billing/manage-bill/about-your-bill/rates-tariffs/electric-tariffs-and-rules</u>, for WMA "Terms & Conditions for Competitive Suppliers" at p. 15 and for EMA at p. 15.

1 the current agreement exclusively to implement the POR program"⁶ actually include a number 2 of "housekeeping" edits, other material changes not related to POR, and create broad 3 inconsistencies between these documents and requirements and authorities that apply to 4 community power aggregations pursuant to RSA 53-E and Puc 2200 rules, as explained in 5 more detail below. The third concern and objection by CPCNH is to the inclusion of new 6 requirements for a creditworthiness test, security, and potential collateral requirements, 7 ostensibly due to increased financial risk to the utility from administering POR, but which 8 create substantial barriers to new entry for CPA and CEPS market participants, favoring 9 established large competitive suppliers. There is no testimony in support of these proposals. 10 Q. Before elaborating on your objections, how might these concerns best be 11 addressed procedurally? 12 A. Although some progress might be made in settlement discussions, CPCNH 13 recommends that resolution of tariff and supplier agreement text largely occur after the basic 14 structure and parameters of the POR program are approved by the Commission. This would be 15 broadly consistent with approach suggested by Eversource in the testimony of Brendan O'Brien in DE 23-004 at 8 which states: "the Company anticipates an eight-month 16 17 implementation timeline for its POR Program once approved; the Company proposes 18 submission of the revised tariff and supplier agreements for Commission review during that 19 eight-month implementation period." However, they suggest that be done as part of a 20 compliance filing, which creates another problem related to lack of notice as to the scope of 21 this proceeding. Eversource and Liberty have both made good faith efforts in their first draft

⁶ DOE 1-8, Attachment Coaltion-3

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1 of supplier agreement language and in Eversource's case, tariff language, to address the 2 numerous ways in which existing text for CEPS does not conform to the requirements and 3 authorities pursuant to RSA 53-E and Puc 2200 rules. In fact, Liberty indicated that a separate 4 supplier agreement for CPAs and CEPS when not serving CPAs might be appropriate and just 5 offered an agreement for CPA suppliers incorporating POR. However, these draft proposals 6 only came in the second round of discovery, so there will be no opportunity for data requests 7 or a technical session before filing of DOE and intervenor testimony or comments. 8 Unitil correctly points out that these additional issues, not directly related to POR, are 9 beyond the scope of what this proceeding was noticed for. We agree, and thus propose that the 10 Commission notice a separate adjudicated proceeding to address the integration of Community 11 Power Aggregators (CPAs) and CEPS when serving CPAs into the tariffs and supplier 12 agreements of these 3 utilities, along with conforming POR language. As Unitil has the 13 shortest anticipated time to implement POR following Commission approval of 4 months, 14 which would likely take us into 2024 for the first start of POR, that would seem to allow sufficient time over the course of the fall to undertake such a proceeding. 15

Q. What are some examples of specific conflicts that Unitil's proposed incorporation
of POR into their tariff and supplier agreement create?

A. Unitil has proposed that CPAs simply be added to their definition of "Competitive
Supplier" in the tariff and supplier agreement, so that all existing (and modified) terms apply
equally to both. One issue with this approach is that Unitil's draft tariff would then require
CPAs or CEPS when serving CPAs to obtain prior written consent from each customer before

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enrolling and when requesting load history for each customer. This requirement obviously
 conflicts with RSA 53-E and Puc 2200 rules.

3 Q. Could you elaborate on your objections to the proposed creditworthiness test and 4 potential collateral requirements, besides the fact that there is no testimony in support of 5 them?

6 Yes, Unitil has proposed amending their Competitive Electric Supplier Trading Partner A. 7 Agreement to (i) impose utility-administered creditworthiness tests upon CPAs and CEPS that 8 intend to elect consolidated billing, as a precondition for entering into the agreement, (ii) 9 require CPAs and CEPS that are not "creditworthy" thereunder to post additional collateral for 10 the utility's benefit, such as a letter of credit, parent guaranty from a creditworthy entity, et 11 cetera, and (iii) require CPAs and CEPS to grant Unitil a "first priority perfected security 12 interest" over all of their billed and unbilled accounts receivables. 13 Unitil has acknowledged that there is no statutory basis for imposing these sweeping 14 financial security obligations, which impose additional costs on the customers served by CPAs 15 and CEPS and create barriers to market entry for all but the established market incumbents, 16 and which Unitil has "based, in large part, on the terms and conditions and supplier service

agreement applicable to and approved for the POR Program of Unitil's Massachusetts affiliate,

18 Fitchburg Gas and Electric Light Company ("FG&E")" in their response to CPCNH 1-7.

19 Unitil argues that this is necessary to avoid cost shifting to other ratepayers in the event 20 that a supplier goes bankrupt on the theory that the Court or trustee might have a claim against 21 Unitil's accounts receivable. However, once Unitil purchases the receivable, they own them, 22 and although a bankruptcy court has the power to claw-back certain transactions, there is no

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reason to believe that such a court or trustee would want to do so and assume the responsibility
for collecting from thousands of individual retail customer instead of receiving the AR
Purchase Price that would reflect only a small PUC approved discount from the sold
receivables. Furthermore, there is little if anything that would be owed to Unitil by the
supplier in such a circumstance and nothing that would be different than under current supplier
access to consolidated billing.

7 CPCNH alternatively proposes that the utility's tariff be amended to require that the 8 ownership of a CPA or CEPS receivables be transferred, irrevocably and entirely to Unitil at the 9 moment the utility creates the invoice or bill to the customer, which then becomes their property 10 and asset, and to which the supplier cannot offer a security interest because it, from the moment 11 of quantifiable creation, is no longer an asset of supplier and thus cannot be used as collateral. 12 This assumes that simultaneously Unitil would create a corresponding liability to the supplier of 13 the AR Purchase Price reflecting the PUC approved discount. Then no additional 14 creditworthiness testing or requirements need be imposed beyond the extant Financial Security Requirements for Competitive Suppliers set forth at Puc 2003.01 and 2003.03. 15

- 16 Q. Does that conclude your testimony?
- 17 A. Yes it does.

Unitil Energy Systems, Inc. Docket No. DE 23-002 Proposed Purchase of Receivables Program Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire Data Requests Set 1

Received: 5/4/23 Request No. CPCNH 1-3 Date of Response: 5/19/23 Witness: Elena Demeris, Christopher Goulding, Gary Mathews

Request:

RE: UES Response to DOE 1-7. Terms and Conditions for Competitive Suppliers, Section III.6(B)(4)b: Under "Consolidated Billing Service and POR Program," UES describes the discount percentage rate (DPR) and the formula it intends to use for computing the DPR.

- (a) How will UES hold customer payments it receives until payment is made to a Supplier?
- (b) What restrictions will exist on the use UES may make of customer payments it receives prior to making payment to a Supplier?
- (c) How does the DPR account for the time value of money for period UES will hold customer payments from the time payment is received by UES until payment is made to the Competitive Supplier?
- (d) If the DPR does not include the time value for the period UES will hold customer funds received prior to payment for such amounts to Competitive Suppliers, why is that appropriate?

Response:

(a) The Company's proposal is to make a single monthly payment on the last Business Day of the calendar month to each participating Competitive Supplier for all POR customers billed on their behalf during the prior calendar month of service. The Company will pay the supplier the full amounts due from Customers for Generation Service, less the DPR.

The Company does not receive a payment from a customer when they bill customers. As established in the Company's last rate case in Docket No. DE 21-030, on average, there is a 40.70 days revenue lag¹ between when a customer is billed and when the Company receives payment from customers. The proposal made by the Company accounts for this delay by remitting billed revenues in one month on the last day of the subsequent month.

(b) Please refer to the response to (a)

¹ Docket No. DE 21-030, Exhibit DJH-2, Page 2 of 3 lines 6 (Collection Lag of 39.02 days) + lines 8 (Collection to Receipt of Available Funds of 1.68 days).

Unitil Energy Systems, Inc. Docket No. DE 23-002 Proposed Purchase of Receivables Program Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire Data Requests Set 1

Received: 5/4/23 Request No. CPCNH 1-3 Date of Response: 5/19/23 Witness: Elena Demeris, Christopher Goulding, Gary Mathews

- (c) Please refer to the response to (a)
- (d) Please refer to the response to (a)

Unitil Energy Systems, Inc. Docket No. DE 23-002 Proposed Purchase of Receivables Program Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire Data Requests Set 1

Received: 5/4/23 Request No. CPCNH 1-7 Date of Response: 5/19/23 Witness: Elena Demeris, Christopher Goulding

Request:

Reference: UES Response to DOE 1-7. Terms and Conditions for Competitive Suppliers, Section III.6(B)(4)b.(iii)(3): Over the last three years, how has the rate for short-term borrowing for UES' needs compared with the prime rate?

Response:

Please see CPCNH 1-7 Attachment 1 for a comparison of the Short Term Borrowing rate and the Quarterly Prime Rate in accordance with PUC 1202.13. Please note that the rate cited in Terms and Conditions for Competitive Suppliers, Section III.6(B)(4)b.(iii)(3) is not, strictly speaking, the actual prime rate, but a quarterly rate based on the prime rate in effect the first day of the month preceding the calendar quarter. The quarterly prime rate is posted on the PUC web: <u>https://www.puc.nh.gov/Consumer/PrimeRates.html</u> NHPUC Docket No. DE 23-002 Testimony of Clifton C. Below for CPCNH ATT. Coalition - 2

Unitil Energy Systems, Inc.

Comparison of Short Term Borrowing Rate and Quarterly Prime Rate

	Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20
Short Term Borrowing Rate	2.813%	2.813%	2.813%	2.813%	2.813%	2.813%	2.813%	2.813%	2.813%	2.813%	2.813%	2.813%
Quarterly Prime Rate per PUC 1202.13	4.750%	4.750%	4.750%	4.750%	4.750%	4.750%	3.250%	3.250%	3.250%	3.250%	3.250%	3.250%
	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21
Short Term Borrowing Rate	1.256%	1.239%	1.233%	1.237%	1.225%	1.210%	1.219%	1.216%	1.209%	1.210%	1.214%	1.229%
Quarterly Prime Rate per PUC 1202.13	3.250%	3.250%	3.250%	3.250%	3.250%	3.250%	3.250%	3.250%	3.250%	3.250%	3.250%	3.250%
	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22
Short Term Borrowing Rate	1.231%	1.264%	1.504%	1.684%	2.028%	2.505%	3.154%	3.525%	3.976%	4.579%	5.097%	5.497%
Quarterly Prime Rate per PUC 1202.13	3.250%	3.250%	3.250%	3.250%	3.250%	3.250%	4.000%	4.000%	4.000%	5.500%	5.500%	5.500%

Note: The quarterly prime rate per PUC 1202.13 is the prime rate effective the first day of the month preceeding the calendar quarter. New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission (nh.gov) Unitil Energy Systems, Inc. Docket No. DE 23-002 Proposed Purchase of Receivables Program Department of Energy Data Requests Set 1

Received: 4/7/23 Request No. DOE 1-8 Date of Response: 4/21/23 Witness: Christopher Goulding/Elena Demeris

Request:

Please provide a copy of the amended tariff terms and condition of service for competitive suppliers as well as the amended competitive supplier trading partner agreement.

Response:

Please see DOE 1-8 Attachment 1 for a redlined copy of the amended tariff terms and conditions showing changes to the current tariff exclusively to implement the POR program. Please see DOE 1-8 Attachment 2 for a redlined copy of the amended competitive supplier trading partner agreement showing changes to the current agreement exclusively to implement the POR program.¹

The Company's amended terms and conditions and amended trading partner agreement are based, in large part, on the terms and conditions and supplier service agreement applicable to and approved for the POR Program of Unitil's Massachusetts affiliate, Fitchburg Gas and Electric Light Company. As noted in the Company's initial testimony, Fitchburg Gas and Electric Light Company has developed, implemented, and currently administers a POR Program in Massachusetts. The Company leveraged its experience operating the Massachusetts POR Program in the design of the POR Program proposed in this docket.

Maintaining consistency between the Company's Massachusetts and New Hampshire POR programs is in the best interest of the Company, customers, and participating competitive suppliers to facilitate orderly business transactions between counterparties, minimize implementation and administrative costs for the Program, and commence the POR Program in a timely manner.

¹ The form of Trading Partner Agreement is currently a part of the Company's Electric Delivery Tariff. However, Unitil understands that it is an outlier in this respect, as the other electric utility companies do not include their supplier service agreement in their respective tariffs. In order to align Unitil's practices with the other electric utilities, the Company will propose to remove the form of Trading Partner Agreement from its Electric Delivery Tariff.