

**From:** Yadin Flammer

**Sent:** Sunday, June 11, 2023 10:29 AM

**To:** PUC: <[puc@puc.nh.gov](mailto:puc@puc.nh.gov)>; PUC: Clerks Office <[clerksoffice@puc.nh.gov](mailto:clerksoffice@puc.nh.gov)>

**Subject:** DE 23-039 Liberty Utilities

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To whom it concerns,

I am writing in regards to DE 23-039, Liberty Utilities (Granite State Electric) Corp. Request for Change in Distribution Rates. To put it plainly, this request can not be granted. Allowing this increase would cause undo hardship to the customers and be completely out of line with National standards. The audacity of this request borders on criminal.

Liberty already increased rates about 50% in the last year, apparently without needing any formal authorization from the PUC. With such a massive increase it's unbelievable that there is a request to increase another 40%, and allow for unknown increases without review in each successive year. These are absolutely insane rate increases.

The impact of these increases on the average household in an already strained consumer economy where the percentage of Americans below the poverty line surpasses third world nations is devastating. Families that are struggling to live paycheck to paycheck face their electric rates doubling in a 2 year period, possibly tripling in a 3 year period. One simply can not survive without power between needs for heat, AC, refrigeration, lighting, cooking, and the fact that phone and internet access themselves are nearly life requirements that require power. If you can't allow the power to go out, you risk not paying rent and lose your home entirely? You can't afford food for the family? You can't afford transportation? What has to give when your life is threatened by the power going out because of unreasonable rates?

Liberty's rates are already among the highest in the nation, a fact that is questionable to begin with. What is the purpose of this increase? All we are told is it will result in an additional \$15M in annual revenue for the company. For what?? This smacks of corporate ownership and stock holders getting richer at the expense of the poor suffering. Given there is no public justification provided to the customers via the letter dated May 26, and there is in fact a motion on file for confidentiality of salary information as part of this request, it's rather obvious this has nothing to do with operation and everything to do with greed.

In regards to customer impact, it is further unconscionable that this request is to retroactively apply the rate increase. Based on statements in the request and the PUC response, this means an entire year of back charges could hit the customers in mid 2024. Once again this threatens the very lives of thousands. In context of current foreign conflict and the impacts of targeting public works, this is akin to an international war crime. Dramatic statement? Perhaps, but I question that anyone involved has proper perspective given this request was not rejected outright for its absurdity.

Even if this rate increase was legitimately for operational costs and not salary padding of executives, my personal experience with Liberty, as supported by many other public customer statements, indicates the company makes extremely poor financial decisions. Supporting bad business practices is the wrong

approach. If Liberty can not sustain its practices, it either needs to adjust operations or be sold to another utility company that can run efficiently.

To the point, Liberty recently contracted a third party company (Level 5 Strategy) to conduct customer focus groups. I joined such a group with the hope that Liberty was going to address some obvious customer service issues, not knowing ahead of time what the actual situation was. Upon joining the Zoom call and finding a third party company was in charge and not Liberty, I was instantly horrified at the initial clear waste of funds. It then became clear that the entire focus group was pointless. After 20 minutes of the contractor struggling with the Zoom call and asking each participant to talk about themselves like it was some kind of support group, I left. Nothing useful had been done in that time frame, and it was clear nothing would be done in the entire 1.5 hours it was scheduled for. It was made known the purpose of the meeting, and the ONLY purpose of the meeting (literally stated "we are not here to discuss anything else") was to talk about what Liberty could do to improve communication during an outage. Communicate... during an outage...? When there is no communication possible because the power is out? This was how the company was spending money? I sent follow up to Level 5 and Liberty regarding this and received no reply.

In the 4 years I have been a customer the Liberty website has never worked properly. The account portal has been unusable for offline for years. Their support is useless. I have sent many messages and made several calls regarding these problems to no avail. It's unacceptable that in all this time customers can not access account and billing information online. The only reason I can receive and pay my bills is because Liberty has an online integration with my banking institution. Otherwise I literally would not be able to pay my bills because no method to do so is being provided. I can only assume most customers are not on paperless service due to the fact that it doesn't work. Given Liberty allegedly redesigned the entire account portal last year and it still does not work means that again they are wasting money on failure. They should not be allowed to have another \$15M a year to fail harder and pay their executives more for the failure.

A footnote on retroactive impact. Last year when they "redesigned" the site this impacted account numbers and billing. The result was they couldn't provide bills for 2 months, so customers were then hit with a triple bill. Again, flagrant inability to run a functional company, and no regard for the impact on their customers for a critical service. If they were underfunded then sure there would be a reason for these shortcomings. But again with rates toping the nation, there is no reason they need more income other than to try to compensate for their ineptitude at the expense of the public.

A footnote on service. During the above multi month outage, Liberty was unresponsive by all means. They never responded to a single email. They were unreachable by phone. They didn't respond on Facebook, but the entire time they were posting pictures of their new office dog and posting stories patting themselves on the back for things unrelated to customers or their primary business. I contacted the PUC at that time due to these issues, and as a result of PUC inquiry received a call from a customer service manager at Liberty, who was still unable to address the problems. Clearly this is all unacceptable, again in context of their already nationally high rates.

I submit that the PUC needs to summarily reject any and all rate increase requests from Liberty for the next several years as there can be no reasonable justification for them. Further, I submit that the PUC should conduct a full investigation into the operations of Liberty Utilities with the intent of identifying irresponsible business practices and quite possibly justifying lowering rates. As stated before, if Liberty is unable to operate in a reasonable manner it needs to be bought out by another company. I spent

over 20 years in PA as a customer of many different utility companies for different services. I have never seen a company in such desperate need of being bought out as Liberty. Comcast is a close second, but cable TV isn't actually a basic life need like electricity is.

Thank you for your attention in this matter.  
Yadin Flammer

Shari Boraz  
she/her/hers

AVA Executive Director



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