

**In Re:**

*DW 12-085 AQUARION WATER CO. OF NH, INC.  
PREHEARING CONFERENCE*

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*July 11, 2012*

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*SUSAN J. ROBIDAS, N.H. LCR  
(603) 622-0068 shortptr@comcast.net  
(603) 540-2083 (cell)*

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STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE  
PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

July 11, 2012 - 10:07 a.m.  
Concord, New Hampshire

RE: DW 12-085  
AQUARION WATER COMPANY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE, INC.  
HAMPSHIRE, INC.  
(Notice of Intent to File Rate Schedules)  
PREHEARING CONFERENCE

PRESENT:

Chairman Amy L. Ignatius  
Commissioner Michael D. Harrington  
Commissioner Robert R. Scott  
Sandy Deno - Clerk

APPEARANCES:

Representing Aquarion Water Co. of N.H.  
Patrick H. Taylor (McLane, Graf...)  
Steven Camerino (McLane, Graf...)

Representing Office of Consumer Advocate:  
Rorie E. P. Hollenberg, Esq.  
Donna McFarland

COURT REPORTER: Susan J. Robidas, LCR/RPR No. 44

{DW 12-085} [Prehearing Conference] {07-11-12}

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1 APPEARANCES (CONT'D)

2  
3 Representing Town of Hampton:  
4 Mark S. Gerreald, Esq.

5 Representing PUC Staff:  
6 Marcia A.B. Thunberg, Esq.  
7 Douglas Brogan  
8 Mark Naylor  
9 Jayson LaFlamme

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1 PROCEEDINGS

2 CHAIRMAN IGNATIUS: I'd like

3 to open the hearing in Docket DW 12-085,

4 which is Aquarion Water Company of New

5 Hampshire's request for permanent increase

6 in its rates, with an increase of

7 18.3 percent if approved as filed. Aquarion

8 has also asked for a change of its Water

9 Infrastructure and Conservation Adjustment

10 Pilot Program to become a permanent program,

11 and it asked for authorization to recover a

12 new right-of-way tax in the town of Hampton.

13 There's also a request for temporary rates,

14 but that won't be taken up today. And by

15 order dated July 12, 2012, the Commission

16 scheduled this prehearing conference and

17 required publication of notice of the

18 request.

19 So let's begin with

20 appearances, please.

21 MR. TAYLOR: Thank you.

22 Patrick Taylor from McLane, Graf, Raulerson

23 & Middleton, representing Aquarion Water

24 Company. With me today is Harry Hibbard

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1 from the Company, Troy Dixon, Carl McMorran  
2 and Cam Knowlton, as well as Steve Camerino  
3 from my firm.  
4 CHAIRMAN IGNATIUS: Good  
5 morning. Welcome.  
6 MS. HOLLENBERG: Good morning.  
7 Rorie Hollenberg and Donna McFarland here  
8 for the Office of Consumer Advocate.  
9 CHAIRMAN IGNATIUS: Good  
10 morning.  
11 MR. GERREALD: Good morning.  
12 Mark Gerreald. I'm the town attorney for  
13 the Town of Hampton. And with me is  
14 Selectman Michael Pierce.  
15 CHAIRMAN IGNATIUS: Welcome.  
16 MS. THUNBERG: Good morning,  
17 Commissioners. Marcia Thunberg on behalf of  
18 Staff. With me today is Mark Naylor, Jayson  
19 LaFlamme and Jim Lenihan.  
20 I'd also like to take this  
21 moment to recognize Doug Brogan is with us  
22 for a few more weeks until he retires, and  
23 want to publicly thank him for all his years  
24 of service.

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1 CHAIRMAN IGNATIUS: We don't  
2 usually start out our prehearing conferences  
3 with a tear in our eye. But it's a sad  
4 piece of news, but we're glad for you, Doug.  
5 All right. I think -- do we  
6 have procedural matters before we take up  
7 notices of -- I mean, excuse me, statements  
8 of position? I know we have one request to  
9 intervene from the Town. Do we have any  
10 objections to the request to intervene?  
11 MS. THUNBERG: No objection  
12 from Staff.  
13 MS. HOLLENBERG: No objection.  
14 MR. TAYLOR: No objection.  
15 CHAIRMAN IGNATIUS: The  
16 Commissioners have reviewed the request and  
17 find it appropriate, meets the standards of  
18 541-A, and we will grant the request to  
19 intervene.  
20 MR. GERREALD: Thank you.  
21 CHAIRMAN IGNATIUS: Are there  
22 any other procedural issues? Do we have an  
23 affidavit of publication on the notice?  
24 MR. TAYLOR: Yes, that's been

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1 submitted.  
2 CHAIRMAN IGNATIUS: Great.  
3 Thank you.  
4 All right. Then I think it's  
5 just an opportunity for people to give their  
6 preliminary positions on the filing itself  
7 and then anything that you think you need  
8 Commission's assistance on. If not, then we  
9 will send you off to work on a technical  
10 conference to work up a schedule and begin  
11 the process of discovery on the materials.  
12 So, Mr. Taylor.  
13 MR. TAYLOR: Thank you. On  
14 May 14th, 2012, Aquarion filed a request for  
15 permanent rate increase of \$1,113,931 in  
16 annual revenues based on December 31st, 2011  
17 test year. This is approximately an overall  
18 increase of 18.3 percent. Aquarion is also  
19 seeking temporary rates, providing an  
20 increase of \$732,078 in annual revenues,  
21 which is an overall increase of  
22 approximately 12.03 percent. The Company is  
23 proposing that the increase requested in  
24 this case be applied on an across-the-board

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1 basis, so the percentage increase will be  
2 the same for all classes of customers.  
3 Aquarion filed this case  
4 because it is achieving a rate of return on  
5 equity well below what the Commission  
6 authorized in the Company's last general  
7 rate case. Specifically, the Company's  
8 return on equity for the test year ending  
9 December 31st, 2011, was 3.86 percent,  
10 almost 600 basis points below the currently  
11 allowed return of 9.75 percent. I would  
12 also note that for the 12 months ending  
13 June 30th, 2012, the ROE is down to 2.5  
14 percent. And I just offer that for  
15 illustrative purposes. The Company is  
16 requesting an overall rate of return of  
17 7.87 percent in this case, with a 10.25  
18 return on equity.  
19 Numerous factors contribute to  
20 the Company's need to file this rate case.  
21 Most notably, the Company's experienced a  
22 steady increase in maintenance and operating  
23 expenses, as well as dramatically increased  
24 property and right-of-way taxes assessed by

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1 the communities that it services. Taxes  
2 alone represent approximately 16 percent of  
3 the increase being sought in this case.  
4       Aquarion is also seeing a  
5 general decline in consumption by its  
6 customers, and actual consumption has been  
7 consistently below the level of sales volume  
8 used to calculate the rates established in  
9 the Company's last general rate case. This  
10 is largely attributable to the prevalence of  
11 efficient appliances and conservation  
12 awareness and is a trend that is likely to  
13 continue. As a result, the Company has  
14 experienced a sustained reduction in  
15 revenues.  
16       Aquarion is also making  
17 proposals relative to its Water  
18 Infrastructure and Conservation Adjustment  
19 or WICA Program, which this Commission  
20 approved on a pilot basis in the Company's  
21 last rate case. This program was  
22 implemented to allow the Company to replace  
23 aging infrastructure in a timely and  
24 cost-effective manner and recover the cost

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1 history of rate increases before this  
2 Commission. The frequency of the rate cases  
3 is increasing. This particular rate  
4 increase in 2012 had been preceded by one  
5 that was granted for double digits back in  
6 2009 of 17.44 percent; prior to that, in the  
7 year 2006, 18.64 percent. So, it looks like  
8 a pattern is being sought to be established  
9 of a three-year increment; whereas, prior to  
10 that, prior to the 2006 increase, the prior  
11 one was in the year 2000, six years before,  
12 in DW 99-057; prior to that, the previous  
13 rate increase was in 1992, eight years, in  
14 DR 91-0123.  
15       So we now are experiencing a  
16 frequency -- a greater frequency in rate  
17 increases. And the WICA charge, which was  
18 supposed to decrease -- was designed as a  
19 pilot program to decrease the frequency of  
20 rate increases and to ameliorate rate shock  
21 is not accomplishing that purpose. We have  
22 seen, since the 2009-ordered rate increase,  
23 every year a WICA charge, first of  
24 1.57 percent in 2010, which is DW 10-293,

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1 via a surcharge. Aquarion believes the WICA  
2 Program has provided a significant benefit  
3 to the Company and its customers and  
4 requests that it be continued on an  
5 indefinite basis so that the Company can  
6 continue to improve its infrastructure on an  
7 accelerated basis. Thank you.  
8       CHAIRMAN IGNATIUS: Thank you.  
9 Ms. Hollenberg or Ms. McFarland.  
10       MS. McFARLAND: Ms. Hollenberg  
11 had to step out for a moment.  
12       The Office of Consumer  
13 Advocate takes no position at this time on  
14 any of the issues, and we would look forward  
15 to working with the parties.  
16       CHAIRMAN IGNATIUS: Thank you.  
17 Mr. Gerreald.  
18       MR. GERREALD: Thank you.  
19 This is a matter in which not only a  
20 double-digit permanent rate increase is  
21 sought, but also a double-digit temporary  
22 increase. The Town of Hampton has been  
23 involved in a number of these matters over  
24 the years as an intervenor and noted the

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1 and 3.7269 percent in 2011, in DW 11-238.  
2 So we are now, despite having those  
3 increases since the last rate case in 2006,  
4 seeing yet another attempt to get a  
5 double-digit rate increase, approaching  
6 20 percent. This is in a climate where  
7 our -- the consumers, 76 percent of whom are  
8 in Hampton, are suffering to keep jobs and  
9 keep property, much less to provide a rate  
10 of return of 10-plus percent.  
11       The Company, in its temporary  
12 rate increase petition, on Page 2, says that  
13 the continuation of current rates will  
14 result in the confiscation of the Company's  
15 property. I would suggest to you that the  
16 rate of return -- the increased rate of  
17 return that's being sought would be  
18 confiscatory of the consumers involved who  
19 have already paid rate increases in each of  
20 the last two years. There is an attempt at  
21 justification here, that the biggest driver  
22 of this is the taxes that are being paid to  
23 all the communities. I would suggest to you  
24 that the documents being submitted belie

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1 that, and the biggest percentage of the  
2 increase being sought is the 66 percent in  
3 operating expenses. I would submit to you  
4 that those should be very closely examined  
5 in the coming weeks to see what is the  
6 driver behind those and as to whether the  
7 consumer should be tagged to pay for them.  
8 Finally, regarding the WICA  
9 charge, that was a pilot program, and that's  
10 being sought to be implemented on a  
11 permanent basis. Again, the purposes for  
12 which that was sought, decreasing the  
13 frequency of rate increases and ameliorating  
14 rate shock, are not doing what they were  
15 supposed to do. And we would suggest that  
16 before that program is ever thought to be  
17 made permanent, that it be re-examined to  
18 see if such a program is fulfilling its  
19 purposes. And on behalf of the Town of  
20 Hampton Board of Selectmen, one of whom is  
21 here, I'm authorized to vigorously oppose  
22 these rate increases. Thank you so much.  
23 CHAIRMAN IGNATIUS: Thank you.  
24 Ms. Thunberg.

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1 MS. THUNBERG: Good morning,  
2 Commissioners. Staff just wanted to note  
3 that in the past rate cases, Town of Rye and  
4 the Town of North Hampton and the North  
5 Hampton Water Precinct have participated. I  
6 note that they have not formally intervened  
7 here today. But in talking with the  
8 Company, I'm aware that they have spoken to  
9 the Town of North Hampton Selectmen, and  
10 they've spoken to the North Hampton Water  
11 Commission. So, even though those past  
12 intervenors are not present today, they are  
13 still aware of the case and have another way  
14 of contacting the Company. So I just wanted  
15 to put that on the record.  
16 Yes, there are some nuances  
17 with this particular rate case, such as  
18 WICA, that Staff will need to review. But  
19 other than that, Staff will be conducting  
20 its usual rate case review, and it will be  
21 prepared to make its recommendations on the  
22 issues at the time it files testimony in a  
23 procedural schedule that it hopes to work  
24 out with the Company and intervenors during

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1 the technical session.  
2 As usual, Staff will be  
3 conducting an audit of the Company's books  
4 for the test year. As the record -- or as  
5 the filing indicated, there were \$4.5  
6 million worth of plant additions that will  
7 need to be audited to make sure they are  
8 used and useful and in service. There are  
9 pro forma adjustments that were made in the  
10 filing, and Staff will be scrutinizing those  
11 as well.  
12 The Company has asked for a  
13 10.25 percent on equity, and Staff will be  
14 reviewing that. We note that there is no  
15 cost-of-equity expert, which is good for  
16 rate case expenses, but it makes it a little  
17 difficult for Staff to look at the reasoning  
18 behind the 10.25 request. However, Staff  
19 feels comfortable that during discovery  
20 we'll be able to suss out documentation to  
21 establish why the Company's requesting that.  
22 Staff will be reviewing the  
23 new Town of Hampton right-of-way tax. This  
24 is something we're not familiar with, and

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1 we'll be inquiring of the Company, as well  
2 as the Town, as to the justification, the  
3 legal justification for that tax.  
4 Aquarion has requested special  
5 accounting treatment. It requests that the  
6 expense associated with the right-of-way tax  
7 be considered a deferred asset, along with  
8 the amount for the 2012 portion of the tax,  
9 until temporary rates are granted. Aquarion  
10 seeks to amortize this expense over three  
11 years, and so Staff will be paying special  
12 attention to that treatment and will offer  
13 an opinion at a later date.  
14 Aquarion has conducted a  
15 customer-service satisfaction survey. Staff  
16 will be conducting discovery into that  
17 survey. We're pleased that, according to  
18 the filing, that it reported good results.  
19 Now as to the WICA. In  
20 looking back at the past order approving the  
21 WICA -- that was Order 25,019, and that was  
22 in Aquarion's last rate case back in 2008 --  
23 there were some threshold criteria to review  
24 the WICA by, and Staff will be looking at

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1 that criteria. What Staff culled out of the  
2 prior order were the goals were to promote  
3 the investment of infrastructure  
4 replacement. So we'll be looking at that.  
5 It was to have a goal of mitigating rate  
6 shock, and Staff will be looking at whether  
7 WICA has reduced rate shock. Of course,  
8 there are other variables, other pressures  
9 driving rate increases. So it may be a  
10 little difficult to cull those out. But  
11 we'll be looking at whether it was effective  
12 at reducing rate shock. We will be looking  
13 at whether the program helped reduce lost  
14 water and unaccounted-for water, and whether  
15 it addressed needed non-revenue-producing  
16 assets, asset additions on a timely basis.  
17 In the last rate case, the  
18 Company had directed Staff to the  
19 Connecticut WICA model, and Staff will be  
20 checking in with Connecticut just to see how  
21 WICA worked for that state, just to  
22 thoroughly look at all information available  
23 to us as we render an opinion on the  
24 usefulness of WICA.

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1 Lastly, with respect to the  
2 temporary rate relief, Staff has reviewed  
3 the filing. We don't have a position on  
4 temporary rates yet. But we know that there  
5 are some holes in the filing that we are  
6 certain will be cured with some discovery  
7 responses. So we will be sitting down with  
8 the Company during the technical session to  
9 discuss some of the discovery questions that  
10 we have.  
11 And other than that, we expect  
12 to coordinate with the Company and the  
13 intervenors in a proposed procedural  
14 schedule and a technical session, and we  
15 will file that shortly. Thank you.  
16 CHAIRMAN IGNATIUS: Thank you.  
17 Commissioner Harrington.  
18 CMSR. HARRINGTON: Yes, just a  
19 comment that I would hope people would look  
20 into during the discovery and tech session,  
21 is that it appears that what the Company has  
22 stated is sort of in a downward spiral here.  
23 You're seeing your consumption of water go  
24 down due to energy efficiency -- or water

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1 efficiency or more efficient appliance, and  
2 also because of people being more aware of,  
3 you know, using less natural resources. But  
4 now you're asking for another increase,  
5 which, of course, is only going to make  
6 people more aware of their need to use less  
7 water, which will drive down the amount they  
8 use, and you're sort of in a downward spiral  
9 there.  
10 So, rather than just go  
11 forward and say continue the same ole, same  
12 ole, I really think it's time to start  
13 looking at this and say: What do we need to  
14 do differently? Does the Company need to  
15 change the way they look at things? I think  
16 this is a -- and I put this challenge to all  
17 parties, that continuing granting a rate  
18 increase based on revenue needs, based on  
19 how things were done in the past, is only  
20 going to head us down that downward spiral,  
21 and you'll be back here in a couple of years  
22 saying usage has continued to go down even  
23 more, so we need to raise our rates even  
24 more. And there's got to be some

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1 alternative to that. So I hope all parties  
2 will look into that. And also, realizing  
3 that the tax issue is not the major part of  
4 it, but 16 percent of it being attributed to  
5 taxes is also a thing that I think the Town  
6 needs to look at a little bit and saying if  
7 you're going to put a lot of taxes on the  
8 Company, you've got to expect them to pass  
9 those through in the rates.  
10 So, just some issues I hope  
11 people will look at during the discovery.  
12 CHAIRMAN IGNATIUS: All right.  
13 Ms. Thunberg, yes.  
14 MS. THUNBERG: May Staff just  
15 respond to one of the points that  
16 Commissioner Harrington --  
17 CHAIRMAN IGNATIUS: Certainly.  
18 MS. THUNBERG: -- made about  
19 water usage or consumption declining?  
20 Staff is aware that this is an  
21 issue that not only Aquarion is facing, but  
22 it's a issue that the Pennichuck Companies  
23 are facing and other water utilities are  
24 facing. So, yes, it's definitely on our

1 radar screen. And thank you for making note  
2 of that.

3 CMSR. HARRINGTON: Good.

4 CHAIRMAN IGNATIUS: All right.

5 Anything further?

6 (No verbal response)

7 CHAIRMAN IGNATIUS: Nothing

8 else from the Commissioners.

9 I think the next thing, then,

10 will be we will close the formal part of

11 this proceeding and ask you to stay and work

12 on initial discovery, discussion of the

13 issues and development of a procedural

14 schedule. If Staff can notify us of the

15 results of that, we'd appreciate that. And

16 otherwise, we will adjourn this session and

17 wait to hear from you on the outcome of the

18 technical session. Thank you.

19 (Hearing adjourned at 10:27 a.m.)

20

21

22

23

24

1 C E R T I F I C A T E

2 I, Susan J. Robidas, a Licensed  
3 Shorthand Court Reporter and Notary Public  
4 of the State of New Hampshire, do hereby  
5 certify that the foregoing is a true and  
6 accurate transcript of my stenographic  
7 notes of these proceedings taken at the  
8 place and on the date hereinbefore set  
9 forth, to the best of my skill and ability  
10 under the conditions present at the time.

11 I further certify that I am neither  
12 attorney or counsel for, nor related to or  
13 employed by any of the parties to the  
14 action; and further, that I am not a  
15 relative or employee of any attorney or  
16 counsel employed in this case, nor am I  
17 financially interested in this action.

18

19

20 Susan J. Robidas, LCR/RPR  
21 Licensed Shorthand Court Reporter  
22 Registered Professional Reporter  
23 N.H. LCR No. 44 (RSA 310-A:173)

24

- July 11, 2012  
**DW 12-085 AQUARION WATER CO. OF NH, INC. PREHEARING CONFERENCE**

	<b>2011 (3)</b> 7:16;8:9;12:1	<b>actual (1)</b> 9:6	16:20	<b>believes (1)</b> 10:1
<b>\$</b>	<b>2012 (5)</b> 4:15;7:14;8:13;11:4; 16:8	<b>additions (2)</b> 15:6;17:16	<b>approximately (3)</b> 7:17;22;9:2	<b>below (3)</b> 8:5;10;9:7
<b>\$1,113,931 (1)</b> 7:15	<b>25,019 (1)</b> 16:21	<b>addressed (1)</b> 17:15	<b>Aquarion (13)</b> 4:4,7,23;7:14,18;8:3; 9:4,16;10:1;16:4,9,14; 20:21	<b>benefit (1)</b> 10:2
<b>\$4.5 (1)</b> 15:5	<b>3</b>	<b>adjourn (1)</b> 21:16	<b>Aquarion's (1)</b> 16:22	<b>biggest (2)</b> 12:21;13:1
<b>\$732,078 (1)</b> 7:20		<b>adjourned (1)</b> 21:19	<b>assessed (1)</b> 8:24	<b>bit (1)</b> 20:6
<b>1</b>	<b>3.7269 (1)</b> 12:1	<b>Adjustment (2)</b> 4:9;9:18	<b>asset (2)</b> 16:7;17:16	<b>Board (1)</b> 13:20
<b>1.57 (1)</b> 11:24	<b>3.86 (1)</b> 8:9	<b>adjustments (1)</b> 15:9	<b>assets (1)</b> 17:16	<b>books (1)</b> 15:3
<b>10.25 (3)</b> 8:17;15:13,18	<b>30th (1)</b> 8:13	<b>Advocate (2)</b> 5:8;10:13	<b>assistance (1)</b> 7:8	<b>Brogan (1)</b> 5:21
<b>10:27 (1)</b> 21:19	<b>31st (2)</b> 7:16;8:9	<b>affidavit (1)</b> 6:23	<b>associated (1)</b> 16:6	<b>C</b>
<b>10-293 (1)</b> 11:24	<b>5</b>	<b>Again (1)</b> 13:11	<b>attempt (2)</b> 12:4,20	<b>calculate (1)</b> 9:8
<b>10-plus (1)</b> 12:10	<b>541-A (1)</b> 6:18	<b>aging (1)</b> 9:23	<b>attention (1)</b> 16:12	<b>Cam (1)</b> 5:2
<b>11-238 (1)</b> 12:1	<b>6</b>	<b>allow (1)</b> 9:22	<b>attorney (1)</b> 5:12	<b>Camerino (1)</b> 5:2
<b>12 (2)</b> 4:15;8:12	<b>600 (1)</b> 8:10	<b>allowed (1)</b> 8:11	<b>attributable (1)</b> 9:10	<b>can (2)</b> 10:5;21:14
<b>12.03 (1)</b> 7:22	<b>66 (1)</b> 13:2	<b>almost (1)</b> 8:10	<b>attributed (1)</b> 20:4	<b>Carl (1)</b> 5:1
<b>12-085 (1)</b> 4:3	<b>7</b>	<b>alone (1)</b> 9:2	<b>audit (1)</b> 15:3	<b>case (15)</b> 7:24;8:3,7,17,20;9:3,9, 21;12:3;14:13,17,20; 15:16;16:22;17:17
<b>14th (1)</b> 7:14	<b>7.87 (1)</b> 8:17	<b>along (1)</b> 16:7	<b>audited (1)</b> 15:7	<b>cases (2)</b> 11:2;14:3
<b>16 (2)</b> 9:2;20:4	<b>76 (1)</b> 12:7	<b>alternative (1)</b> 20:1	<b>authorization (1)</b> 4:11	<b>certain (1)</b> 18:6
<b>17.44 (1)</b> 11:6	<b>9</b>	<b>ameliorate (1)</b> 11:20	<b>authorized (2)</b> 8:6;13:21	<b>Certainly (1)</b> 20:17
<b>18.3 (2)</b> 4:7;7:18	<b>9.75 (1)</b> 8:11	<b>ameliorating (1)</b> 13:13	<b>available (1)</b> 17:22	<b>CHAIRMAN (16)</b> 4:2;5:4,9,15;6:1,15, 21;7:2;10:8,16;13:23; 18:16;20:12,17;21:4,7
<b>18.64 (1)</b> 11:7	<b>91-0123 (1)</b> 11:14	<b>amortize (1)</b> 16:10	<b>aware (5)</b> 14:8,13;19:2,6;20:20	<b>challenge (1)</b> 19:16
<b>1992 (1)</b> 11:13	<b>99-057 (1)</b> 11:12	<b>amount (2)</b> 16:8;19:7	<b>awareness (1)</b> 9:12	<b>change (2)</b> 4:8;19:15
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