



**STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
BEFORE THE
PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION**

Docket No. DE 16-383

Liberty Utilities (Granite State Electric) Corp. d/b/a Liberty Utilities
Distribution Service Rate Case

**DIRECT TESTIMONY
OF
SUSAN HOUGHTON-FENTON**

April 29, 2016

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1 **I. INTRODUCTION AND QUALIFICATIONS**

2 **Q. Please state your full name, business address and position.**

3 A. My name is Susan M. Houghton-Fenton and my business address is 15 Buttrick Road,
4 Londonderry, NH 03053. I am the Vice President of Customer Care for Liberty Utilities
5 Service Corp. (“Liberty”), which provides services to Liberty Utilities (Granite State
6 Electric) Corp. (“Granite State” or the “Company”) and Liberty Utilities (EnergyNorth
7 Natural Gas) Corp. (“EnergyNorth”) and in this capacity I am responsible for the
8 customer contact centers, customer walk-in centers, billing, collections, PUC customer
9 complaint resolution, energy efficiency, load data services, and communications and
10 media relations for the Company.

11 **Q. Please describe your educational background and training.**

12 A. I graduated from McGill University in Montreal, Canada with a BA in Economics,
13 Boston College in Chestnut Hill, MA with an MA in Economics, and Northeastern
14 University in Boston, MA with an MBA.

15 **Q. Please describe your professional background.**

16 A. I have 30 years of experience in the natural gas and electric utility industries in New
17 England. I joined Liberty in September 2014. Prior to my employment at Liberty, I was
18 the VP of Energy Solutions Services – New England for National Grid, headquartered in
19 Waltham, MA. During the years before National Grid’s acquisition of KeySpan I held
20 the positions of Director of Sales – New England and President of AMR Data (an
21 unregulated subsidiary) for KeySpan. Before KeySpan’s acquisition of Boston Gas, I
22 held the following positions with Boston Gas Company: Manager of Strategic Planning;

1 Manager of Business Forecasting and Market Research; Manager of Marketing

2 Administration; and Market Research Analyst.

3 **Q. On whose behalf are you testifying today?**

4 A. I am testifying on behalf of Granite State.

5 **Q. Have you previously testified before the New Hampshire Public Utilities**

6 **Commission (“the Commission”)?**

7 A. No.

8 **II. PURPOSE OF TESTIMONY**

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

10 A. The purpose of my testimony is to provide an overview of the customer service
11 improvements we have made since our cutover from National Grid in July 2014.

12 **Q. What was the environment when you started in September 2014?**

13 A. In July 2014, Granite State completed the second billing system conversion in 12 months;
14 the EnergyNorth conversion was first, occurring in September 2013. As with all system
15 conversions, there were some early challenges, but we stabilized our performance by
16 December 2014. In addition, Liberty was still a new organization and was in the midst of
17 building its processes and organization to provide customers with a high standard of
18 service.

1 **Q. What were the priorities in improving customer service?**

2 A. By the fall of 2014, the top priorities were to improve the organizational structure,
3 resources, and processes to meet or exceed the Commission's service targets for call
4 answering service levels, and to ensure that bills were going out on time.

5 **Q. Please summarize the improvements made to Liberty's Contact Center**
6 **performance since July 2014.**

7 A. We have made a number of improvements since July 2014. First, we increased Granite
8 State's call answering service level in the Contact Center. Call answering service level is
9 defined as the percentage of calls answered within 20 seconds. In September and
10 October 2014, our call answering services levels were 62% and 52%, respectively. In
11 October 2014 we quickly re-assessed the organizational structure and resources required
12 to meet or exceed the Commission's 80%, 12-month rolling average target. We recruited
13 and trained additional Customer Service Representatives to handle the call volume and
14 meet the Commission's target. We increased the number of supervisors from one to
15 three, to provide a more effective supervisor-to-agent ratio of 1:11. Finally, we created a
16 dedicated full-time trainer position to ensure that new employees received comprehensive
17 training on the skills and knowledge required to effectively execute their responsibilities
18 in a timely manner. The addition of the trainer also enabled continual refresher training
19 for the entire team.

20 As a result of these changes, our call answering service levels rose to 91% in January
21 2015. Our 12-month rolling average call answering service level at the end of 2015 was

1 88%, well above the Commission's 80% target. Our 12-month rolling average as of
2 March 31, 2016, was 90%.

3 **Q. Please summarize the improvements made to Liberty's billing performance since**
4 **July 2014.**

5 A. Post-conversion billing system issues created a number of billing delays between August
6 and December 2014. Although most of the conversion issues had been resolved by the
7 end of December, these conversion issues not only caused delays in billing cycles, but
8 also created a backlog of unbilled accounts during this period.

9 We took several steps to improve our billing performance. First, our corporate IT
10 partners developed and implemented more effective internal escalation and problem
11 resolution processes. They also developed and implemented a more effective external
12 escalation and problem resolution process with the billing systems vendor. These process
13 improvements ensured more timely resolution of billing system issues.

14 Second, we re-evaluated the staffing level in the billing department and increased the
15 team from 10 billing representatives and analysts in 2014 to 21 full-time employees in
16 2015.

17 As a result, the billing backlog of accounts on hold over 60 days for Granite State was
18 reduced from a total of 1,318 accounts in January 2015 to zero by early September 2015.
19 For the past 16 months, there have been no billing delays of more than two days.

1 **Q. What steps are you taking to ensure that call answering and billing performance**
2 **will continue to remain at the high levels you have experienced in the last several**
3 **months?**

4 A. We continue to actively monitor and manage the results, as well as develop and
5 implement process improvements to ensure that service levels are maintained. Call
6 answering service levels are monitored hourly and daily, and in most cases corrective
7 actions are put in place fairly quickly. Staffing levels and the need for additional
8 Customer Service Representatives are reviewed weekly and adjustments are made
9 promptly. On high volume call days in peak months, we have the ability to supplement
10 the Contact Center workforce by shifting Customer Service Representatives assigned to
11 back office duties back to the telephones. Training is provided daily, weekly and
12 monthly to our Customer Service Representatives. Quality monitoring is conducted
13 weekly and used for coaching and training opportunities.

14 Likewise, processes have been put in place to ensure continued billing performance.
15 Increased staffing levels implemented in early 2015 for billing are maintained. Any
16 change resulting in increased workload and the need for additional staffing will be
17 addressed immediately. Internal and external escalation processes for billing issues are
18 now well established and effective, and we continue to develop and implement process
19 improvements to further enhance performance.

20 Management at every level of the Company is focused on achieving a very high level of
21 performance, and that focus is reflected in the positive results that have been observed
22 over the last several months. Our employees understand the need to perform at a high

1 level, and are engaged in the Company's success. We firmly believe that the changes
2 that have been implemented, and our continuing focus on high performance, will result in
3 sustainable performance.

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

5 A. Yes, it does.