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**Sent:** Saturday, January 9, 2021 2:13 PM

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

**Subject:** DW 20-112 Abenaki Water Company - Request for change in rates

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Dear Public Utility Commissioners,

As a homeowner affected by the action requested on Docket DW 20-112, I respectfully submit my statement and request to be a party to the matter. My position is that the request for a rate hike be denied.

This a small community system serving approximately 20 homes. Most residents of this community of are fairly modest means and several are over 60 years old and living on fixed incomes. Like many parts of this country, many residents have been affected by the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although this is not Abenaki Water Company's fault, it greatly increases the impact of **\*any\*** rate increase on the members of this community.

It appears to me that most of Abenaki Water Company's financial issues with this system are self inflicted. There appears that there was little to no due diligence performed prior to the purchase of this system from Tioga River Water Company. If they had talked to any of the residents of this community, Abenaki would have quickly discovered that there were many serious issues with the quality and maintenance of the water system. To the best of my knowledge, no one from Abenaki actually inspected the system until after the purchase was completed. Abenaki now appears to be seeking financial relief from their customers (who currently have no other source of water) rather than the seller, Tioga River Water Company (setup by Gilford Well). This is unfair, since the community has been complaining about the quality and maintenance of the water system for years. Several of community members brought many of the same issues we still deal with before PUC when Tioga River Water Company petitioned for the last rate hike.

The extreme size of this rate increase is also very concerning. According to the letter sent to residents by Abenaki, a bill of \$68.89 would potentially increase to \$366.44. That is an increase of 530%, which I think anyone would find unreasonable. There is also a slightly lesser proposed "temporary" rate but "temporary" is never defined. The proposed consolidated rate would still be an increase of 162%. I believe this last rate is ultimately what Abenaki is seeking and is making other options as unpalatable as possible in order to gain community acceptance of a high rate increase.

Possibly having the highest rate for water in the state could also impact each resident's ability to sell their home as potential buyers weigh utility costs.

Among the issues we still are dealing with:

- The water from the system still contains a high amount of sediment. This has required us to install a filtration system and to have recently replaced the heating element in our furnace. We have not used our water for drinking in years.
- The water volume and pressure continues to be low. Although this has improved greatly under Abenaki's stewardship, I would describe it as minimally acceptable.
- The cost of the service is high. I believe we were already in the top five for most expensive water prior to the last rate hike.
- Short or no notice outages. Although outages have improved after Abenaki fixed some leaks, there is still a tendency to give residents very short notice for outages. Often notices are sent an hour or less prior to the outage.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on this matter.

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