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| 1 | STATE OF MISSOURI | |
| 2 | PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION | |
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| 6 | TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS | |
| 7 | Rulemaking Hearing | |
| 8 | October 10, 2013 | |
| 9 | Jefferson City, Missouri | |
| | Volume 1 | |
| 10 | | |
| 11 | | |
| 12 | In the Matter of a Proposed) | |
| | Rulemaking to Amend) | |
| 13 | 4 CSR 240-13 Service and) File No. | |
| | Billing Practices for) AX-2013-0091 | |
| 14 | Residential Customers) | |
| 15 | | |
| 16 | | |
| 17 | MORRIS L. WOODRUFF, Presiding, | |
| | CHIEF REGULATORY LAW JUDGE. | |
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| 19 | ROBERT S. KENNEY, Chairman, | |
| | WILLIAM P. KENNEY, | |
| 20 | DANIEL YVES HALL, | |
| | COMMISSIONERS. | |
| 21 | | |
| 22 | | |
| 23 | REPORTED BY: | |
| 24 | KELLENE K. FEDDERSEN, CSR, RPR, CCR NO. 838 | |
| | MIDWEST LITIGATION SERVICES | |
| 25 | | |

| | | Page 2 |
|----|--|--------|
| 1 | APPEARANCES: | |
| 2 | JAMES M. FISCHER, Attorney at Law | |
| 3 | Fischer & Dority 101 Madison, Suite 400 | |
| 4 | Jefferson City, MO 65101 (573)636-6758 | |
| 5 | jfischerpc@aol.com | |
| | FOR: KCPL AND KCPL GMO. | |
| 6 | RICK ZUCKER, Attorney at Law | |
| 7 | Laclede Gas Company 720 Olive Street | |
| 8 | St. Louis, MO 63101 | |
| 9 | (314)342-0532 | |
| 10 | FOR: Laclede Gas Company. | |
| 11 | SARAH GIBONEY, Attorney at Law Smith Lewis, LLP | |
| | 111 South 9th Street, Suite 200 | |
| 12 | P.O. Box 918 Columbia, MO 65205-0918 | |
| 13 | (573)443-3141 giboney@smithlewis.com | |
| 14 | FOR: Ameren Missouri. | |
| 15 | | |
| 16 | L. RUSSELL MITTEN, Attorney at Law Brydon, Swearengen & England, P.C. 312 East Capitol | |
| 17 | P.O. Box 456 | |
| 18 | Jefferson City, MO 65102-0456 (573)635-7166 | |
| 19 | rmitten@brydonlaw.com | |
| 20 | FOR: The Empire District Electric Company. | |
| 21 | TIM LUFT, Attorney at Law | |
| | Missouri American Water Company | |
| 22 | 727 Craig Road St. Louis, MO 63141 | |
| 23 | (314)996-2279 timothy.luft@amwater.com | |
| 24 | FOR: Missouri-American Water | |
| 25 | Company. | |

| | | Page 3 |
|-----|---------------------------------------|--------|
| 1 | JOHN COFFMAN, Attorney at Law | |
| 2 | 871 Tuxedo Boulevard | |
| 3 | St. Louis, MO 63119 | |
| 4 | (573) 424-6779 | |
| 5 | | |
| 6 | FOR: AARP. | |
| 7 | Consumers Council of Missouri. | |
| 8 | JACKI LINGUM, Attorney at Law | |
| 9 | 4232 Forest Park | |
| 10 | St. Louis, MO 63108 | |
| 11 | (314) 256-8746 | |
| 12 | | |
| | FOR: Legal Services of Eastern | |
| 13 | Missouri. | |
| 14 | | |
| 15 | MARC D. POSTON, Senior Public Counsel | |
| | Office of the Public Counsel | |
| 16 | P.O. Box 2230 | |
| | 200 Madison Street, Suite 650 | |
| 17 | Jefferson City, MO 65102-2230 | |
| | (573) 751-4857 | |
| 18 | | |
| | FOR: Office of the Public Counsel | |
| 19 | and the Public. | |
| 20 | JENNIFER HERNANDEZ, Senior Counsel | |
| | AKAYLA JONES, Legal Counsel | |
| 21 | Missouri Public Service Commission | |
| 0.0 | P.O. Box 360 | |
| 22 | 200 Madison Street | |
| 0.0 | Jefferson City, MO 65102 | |
| 23 | (573) 751–3234 | |
| 24 | FOR: Staff of the Missouri Public | |
| 0.5 | Service Commission. | |
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| 1 | PROCEEDINGS | |
| 2 | (WHEREUPON, the rulemaking hearing | |
| 3 | began at 10:00 a.m.) | |
| 4 | JUDGE WOODRUFF: Welcome everyone. | |
| 5 | This is a rulemaking hearing concerning the | |
| 6 | Commission's proposals to revise its Chapter 13 | |
| 7 | rules on service and billing practices for | |
| 8 | residential customers. | |
| 9 | The proposed amendments have already | |
| 10 | been published in the Missouri Register, so this is | |
| 11 | a chance for the public to file comments. We have | |
| 12 | already received written comments from several | |
| 13 | people and organizations. I see some of those | |
| 14 | people are here again today. Of course, you don't | |
| 15 | need to repeat yourselves. We already have the | |
| 16 | written comments. But you are, of course, welcome | |
| 17 | to expand upon what you've already filed as written | |
| 18 | comments, and you're welcome to respond to the | |
| 19 | comments that were filed by the other parties. The | |
| 20 | goal here is to try to get as much information from | |
| 21 | the public as possible. | |
| 22 | When you come up to give your | |
| 23 | comments, I ask you to come up to the podium, and | |
| 24 | when you're finished making your comments, then | |
| 25 | I'll give the Commissioners an opportunity to ask | |

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- 1 any questions they may have to follow up on that.
- 2 I don't have any set schedule for who is going to
- 3 go first, although I do anticipate asking Staff to
- 4 go last just so that they can respond to the other
- 5 comments that might be made today.
- 6 So I'll throw it open. Who would
- 7 like to go first? Anyone? Mr. Zucker?
- 8 MR. ZUCKER: Well, I think the
- 9 consumer groups I think had the most objection to
- 10 the rules as proposed, so I would suggest that they
- 11 go first, or that maybe --
- 12 MR. COFFMAN: I suggest Mr. Zucker
- 13 goes first.
- MR. POSTON: It's usually the most in
- 15 opposition goes last.
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: That is correct
- 17 under our rules, the most in opposition is supposed
- 18 to go last, unless otherwise ordered by the
- 19 presiding officer. So we can do whatever we want.
- 20 Mr. Zucker, you spoke up, so go ahead.
- 21 MR. ZUCKER: Thank you, your Honor.
- 22 Let me also add that I think there are some other
- 23 utilities who are going to speak here today, and I
- 24 think it would be fair --
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: Come on up to the

Page 6 podium. We are web casting this, by the way, so 2 that the world can be watching it as well. 3 MR. ZUCKER: That's super. JUDGE WOODRUFF: The importance of 4 5 that is that you need to be at a microphone. 6 Otherwise, they can't hear. 7 MR. ZUCKER: So other utilities I think plan to speak today, and I think it would be 8 fair for maybe some back and forth, in other words, not have all the utilities speak and then the 10 11 consumer groups speak, so maybe some alternating, 12 if that works for the Commission. JUDGE WOODRUFF: Go ahead. 13 14 MR. ZUCKER: May it please the Commission? 15 16 My name is Rick Zucker. I am here 17 representing Laclede Gas Company and Missouri Gas Energy. With me today are -- is Ron Crow. He is 18 our senior director of customer services. And 19 David Hendershot is right there waving, and next to 20 21 him is John Lair. Both David and John are with the credit and collection departments of our respective 22 organizations. 23 24 I would like to begin by saying that I thought this day would never come. We -- I first 25

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- 1 began going to the, what we call the collaborative
- 2 meetings to discuss updating the Chapter 13 rules
- 3 in 2005. And I brought with me an agenda here from
- 4 a meeting that we had March 16th, 2005, and on the
- 5 agenda it says continue review and discussion of
- 6 rule revisions for 4 CSR 240 Chapter 13, and I note
- 7 the word continue there. So I don't know how long
- 8 before March of 2005 it started, but we've been at
- 9 this a long time.
- 10 I would like to thank the Commission
- 11 and the Staff for their hard work and their dogged
- 12 determination to see this project through to the
- 13 end. I can't single out everyone from the Staff
- 14 who worked on this over the years, but I would like
- 15 to at least recognize Gay Fred and her staff, along
- 16 with various other groups, including Staff Counsel,
- 17 Tom Imhoff and his tariffs group, Lisa Kremer and
- 18 her management services folks, Jim Merciel, Kay
- 19 Niemeier and many others.
- The purpose of the Chapter 13 rule
- 21 revisions, as I understood it, was to update and
- 22 modernize the rules so that they are relevant to
- 23 modern utility technology and to do this without
- 24 upsetting the balance that exists among the utility
- 25 and the various residential customers. And that

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- 1 balance as I see it is not just between utilities
- 2 and customers on the one hand and the other hand,
- 3 but between utilities and customers who pay their
- 4 bills and the small minority of customers who don't
- 5 pay their bills either because they're not able to
- 6 or because they're not willing to.
- 7 And so these rules strike a balance
- 8 for those customers -- between those two customer
- 9 groups because, to the extent customers are not
- 10 paying their bills and incur bad debt, the paying
- 11 customers have to pay for that.
- 12 For the most part, we believe that
- 13 Staff and the Commission accomplished the goal of
- 14 updating Chapter 13 and maintaining that balance.
- 15 For -- with regard to the modern technology, the
- 16 Staff and Commission have now -- do now have rules
- 17 that contemplate electronic billing and notice,
- 18 remote meter reading, and credit scoring for
- 19 deposits.
- As you can tell from the comments
- 21 that were filed on Monday, no one is completely
- 22 pleased with the outcome. There were a number of
- 23 decisions made by Staff that I wish had gone the
- 24 other way. But on balance, it's a fair document
- 25 and it improves the Chapter 13 rules.

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- 1 Let me jump to one particularly
- 2 well-written section, and that's Section 13.020(2).
- 3 If you have the Missouri Register, that's on
- 4 page 1365. The subject of that provision is
- 5 estimated bills. The rule needed to be modernized
- 6 to account for the fact that many utilities obtain
- 7 their meter readings remotely and not through a
- 8 fleet of meter readers who are fanned out on the
- 9 streets.
- In addition, the rule had a loophole
- 11 in it that made it appear that utilities could
- 12 estimate bills indefinitely. The new proposed rule
- 13 now allows for estimated billing due to equipment
- 14 failure of those automated meter reading devices,
- which is completely appropriate and necessary,
- 16 while at the same time it closed that loophole by
- 17 limiting the number of estimated bills that the
- 18 utility could issue and requiring the utility to
- 19 take responsibility for fixing the problem with the
- 20 device.
- 21 This section is fair and balanced,
- 22 and utilities can comply with it without incurring
- 23 unreasonable costs. And so I -- I applaud that
- 24 particular section and the way that Staff resolved
- 25 the problem.

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- 1 Meanwhile, our friends with OPC,
- 2 AARP, Legal Services of Eastern Missouri, Consumers
- 3 Council of Missouri and Ms. Hutchinson, who I will
- 4 aggregately refer to as the consumer groups, they
- 5 view an actual meter read as something sacred to be
- 6 obtained at any cost.
- 7 While we also prefer to base -- to
- 8 bill based on actual usage when we can, and we do
- 9 so about 99 percent of the time, it's simply not
- 10 fiscally wise to hire a staff of meter readers to
- 11 pick up that other -- or to try and pick up that
- 12 other 1 percent every month. I think Staff and the
- 13 Commission have struck a responsible balance with
- 14 Rule 13.020(2).
- The main exception that we find to
- 16 this good work by the Staff is the physician
- 17 medical certificate process located in Rule 13.050.
- 18 The rule was a late entry in the -- in that long
- 19 workshop process and occurred after the regular
- 20 meetings had come to an end. So we haven't had a
- 21 great deal of time to look at this process or to
- 22 have the kind of feedback that we gave Staff and
- 23 the other parties while we were having those
- 24 meetings.
- I guess the first question is, why do

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- 1 we need this process? Because it's not clear to us
- 2 what's wrong with the current process, which is
- 3 similar to the proposed program. In other words,
- 4 the pro-- we are already providing -- we're already
- 5 deferring disconnection for people with urgent
- 6 medical problems, and that's in the rules and we do
- 7 that. We defer it for 21 -- up to 21 days, purpose
- 8 being to give those customers time to either find
- 9 the resources to pay the bills or to find other
- 10 accommodations.
- 11 The difference with the proposed
- 12 program is there's a lot of red tape that goes with
- 13 it, and the utilities are not -- not prepared at
- 14 this point to implement it.
- We suggest that this particular
- 16 provision be tabled pending further review of the
- 17 current state of our emergency medical programs and
- 18 what exactly is the problem we're addressing with
- 19 this process. We the utilities haven't experienced
- 20 much of an issue, if any, with these emergency
- 21 medical conditions.
- 22 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Mr. Zucker, can I
- 23 ask a question?
- MR. ZUCKER: Certainly.
- 25 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Who advocated that

Page 12 change? 1 2 MR. ZUCKER: Well, since it occurred 3 so late in the process, I'm not sure. It just sort of showed up from Staff. So maybe someone else can 4 5 shed some more light on that. 6 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: And you said the 7 utilities aren't prepared to implement it. What would you have to do differently than what you are 8 9 doing now? 10 MR. ZUCKER: Well, there's a lot of notices that have to go back and forth and training 11 to learn the 14-day rule, if you get a more 12 13 informal call from a physician's office, how to recognize who is working in a physician's office 14 15 and who's authorized to give that notice, and then to send notices to physicians' offices and get them 16 17 back within the 28-day period. And, in addition, it's not clear to 18 me in reading the rule if that period is renewable. 19 From one of the provisions, it looks like it isn't. 20 21 It just -- it just expires after the 28 days, but it doesn't really address the issue. So I think 22 that's -- I'm not sure what's intended, but I think 23 24 that's a problem with it in addition. 25 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Thank you.

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- 1 MR. ZUCKER: As Judge Woodruff
- 2 suggested, I'm not going to go into detail on the
- 3 comments we filed on Monday, but I do want to add a
- 4 small housekeeping point that we didn't put in on
- 5 Monday, and that's in Rule 13.015, under the
- 6 definition of bill, and there is a comma that I
- 7 believe should be after the words electronic demand
- 8 that's missing.
- 9 And so the purpose of that is to
- 10 offset the word electronic -- the phrase electronic
- demand so that it becomes an example of a written
- 12 demand and doesn't belong to the rest of the
- 13 sentence. And so let me read the sentence into the
- 14 record as we would have it. Bill means a written
- 15 demand including, if agreed to by the customer and
- 16 the utility, an electronic demand, for payment for
- 17 service or equipment and the taxes, surcharge and
- 18 franchise fees.
- I also do not intend to address all
- of, and I counted them to be about 30, comments and
- 21 suggestions by the consumer groups, but I would
- 22 like to highlight some of them.
- I think the -- of all of the
- 24 comments, the worst one by far is the suggestion
- 25 that a utility should not be able to disconnect

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- 1 service based on estimates. First, the whole
- 2 purpose of an estimate when we don't get an actual
- 3 reading and have to estimate a bill is to serve as
- 4 a proxy for an actual bill that the customer would
- 5 have expected to receive under the circumstances,
- 6 and the customer should then be expected to pay it.
- 7 To instead signal to the customer
- 8 that the customer really doesn't have to pay that
- 9 amount is completely counterproductive and renders
- 10 the entire estimating process moot. In other
- 11 words, why send them a -- why go to the trouble of
- 12 estimating a bill if the customer doesn't have to
- 13 pay it?
- 14 Second point, and most important, not
- 15 disconnecting a customer for failure to pay an
- 16 estimated bill gives the customer every incentive
- 17 to frustrate our attempts to fix the problem and
- 18 stop the estimates. If you don't have to pay if a
- 19 bill is estimated, you're going to want the bill to
- 20 continue to be estimated.
- I'd like to move on now to
- 22 Rule 13.030. The consumer groups want to use the
- 23 old subjective rules that are currently in the
- 24 rules to take deposits under that section. We have
- 25 suggested and it appears that the Staff and

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- 1 Commission have accepted that credit scoring can be
- 2 used to determine deposits. We filed comments on
- 3 Monday suggesting that a more definite statement be
- 4 made that credit scoring is eligible for use for
- 5 determining deposits.
- There can be no doubt that credit
- 7 scoring is simpler, faster, more objective and more
- 8 accurately targeted to seek a deposit from
- 9 customers who are less likely to pay their bills.
- 10 And we also added that customers who haven't
- 11 established a credit score tend to be -- our
- 12 studies show that those customers tend to be in the
- 13 marginal group, right around the area where we
- 14 would like to take a deposit.
- 15 Right now the proposed rule says that
- 16 we wouldn't be allowed to take a deposit from a
- 17 customer who has no credit score. Our view is that
- 18 that customer has not yet established a credit
- 19 rating and, given our studies, should be eligible
- 20 for paying a deposit.
- Now, the consumer groups have said,
- 22 well, that customer who doesn't have a credit score
- 23 could very well be a good credit risk. Well, if
- 24 the customer does turn out to be a good credit
- 25 risk, which I'm sure many of them will, then they

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- 1 will only have given us money that we'll keep for a
- 2 year while they pay their bills.
- 3 And the rules provide that after 12
- 4 months we would then refund the money or credit it
- 5 to their account with interest. And the interest
- 6 is currently 4 and a quarter percent, so that's a
- 7 pretty good deal for customers. And, in fact, some
- 8 customers when they hear that want to give us a
- 9 deposit. They try to insist on it.
- 10 Credit scoring provides an objective
- 11 view. It gives us a number and the -- and we can
- 12 then say whether or not a new customer should pay a
- 13 deposit. It's based on sophisticated statistical
- 14 models that are available to determine actual
- 15 credit risk.
- 16 It doesn't have the subjective
- 17 factors that the current -- the current process
- 18 have. And so we don't have to ask customers, for
- 19 example, do you have a regular, adequate source of
- 20 income? Because that question doesn't really get
- 21 to the point of whether or not you're a person who
- 22 tends to pay their bills.
- 23 Also under Rule 13.030 the consumer
- 24 groups addressed the maximum limit of a deposit,
- 25 and this is for a deposit on customers who have

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- 1 failed to pay in the past. That maximum limit is
- 2 either two times the highest bill or four times the
- 3 average bill, whichever is in the company's tariff.
- 4 The purpose of this rule was to
- 5 accommodate utilities whose systems are different.
- 6 For example, Laclede's system is able to spit out
- 7 an average bill but is not as reliable on the -- on
- 8 figuring the highest bill. And so that allows us
- 9 to do the four times the average bill, which we
- 10 have in our tariff, and we demonstrated to Staff
- 11 that that amount is -- tends to be slightly lower
- 12 than two times the highest bill.
- 13 And so the goal is not to use either
- 14 two times the highest bill or four times the
- 15 average bill and try to figure out which one gives
- 16 us more of a deposit. The goal is just simply to
- 17 accommodate the computer systems of the different
- 18 utilities, and so the -- I'm sorry.
- 19 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Go ahead. I'm
- 20 sorry. Finish.
- 21 MR. ZUCKER: I was just going to say,
- 22 the consumer groups have asked for the maximum
- 23 deposit to be the lesser of two times the highest
- 24 bill or four times the average bill, and I would
- 25 point out that those two numbers are not meant to

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- 1 be compared to each other. They're just meant to
- 2 accommodate the utility's systems, and if we have
- 3 to compare them, that defeats the purpose and makes
- 4 things harder because we -- utilities that don't do
- 5 both can't make the comparison.
- 6 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Thank you. Can I
- 7 ask a question back to the credit scoring? Does
- 8 the -- the rule provides that each utility would
- 9 just be able to put in its tariff what the score is
- 10 going to be, what the criteria is going to be,
- 11 right?
- MR. ZUCKER: Yes, sir.
- 13 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: And each utility
- 14 would be free to decide which consumer services
- 15 agency they would use to obtain that credit score,
- 16 correct?
- 17 MR. ZUCKER: Well, if it goes in the
- 18 tariff, it would be nice if the utility could do
- 19 that, but when you file a tariff, other people can
- 20 object to it and make comments and negotiate it.
- 21 And so it ends up being kind of a negotiated
- 22 factor, but yes, in general.
- 23 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: I guess the point
- 24 I'm making is there's nothing in the rule that says
- 25 you have to use TRW or Transunion and this will be

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- 1 the objective score that will be determined. So
- 2 each utility will have its own tariff that sets
- 3 those criteria?
- 4 MR. ZUCKER: That's correct. And
- 5 right now our tariff -- we are doing this in our
- 6 tariff. We got the right to do that during a rate
- 7 case, and our tariff actually does tie to a
- 8 specific model by a specific company.
- 9 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: So -- and I guess
- 10 my question is, then, potentially there's a lack of
- 11 uniformity across utilities with respect to what
- 12 the criteria will or will not be, No. 1.
- 13 And then No. 2, is there any concern
- 14 that using credit scoring -- I'm trying to figure
- 15 out how to word this -- doesn't accurately reflect
- 16 the difference between utility services and your
- 17 Macy's bill?
- 18 And I guess what I'm asking is, is a
- 19 person's risk of default the same with respect to a
- 20 critical utility service as it would be with
- 21 respect to some other consumer product? Have there
- 22 been any studies done in that regard?
- 23 MR. ZUCKER: Well, it may or may not
- 24 be, but the -- the criteria we use is specific to
- 25 utility bills. So it uses statistics based on a

Page 20 customer's payment of utility bills, not other 2 bills. 3 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: So you're using a company that provides a score that's specifically 4 5 tailored to testing a consumer's risk with respect to utility services, not generally consumer 6 7 products? MR. ZUCKER: I believe that's 8 9 correct. 10 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: But there's no requirement in this rule that would require every 11 12 other utility in the state to use that similar model or that same model? 13 14 MR. ZUCKER: And not only that, but 15 there's not a rule that would require them to use credit scoring if they haven't --16 17 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: At all? 18 MR. ZUCKER: -- at all if they haven't -- you know, there's a cost to it. There's 19 20 system work that needs to be done to accommodate 21 it, and some -- well, back when we were talking about this in 2005, some utilities said, we're not 22 23 ready to do that yet. 24 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: And I know you can't speak for all the utilities, but do you see 25

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- 1 that there might be some merit in having the rule
- 2 specify that if a utility's going to use credit
- 3 scoring, that it should use Acme Reporting Agency
- 4 or whatever it is that is specifically tailored
- 5 towards assessing risk with respect to utility
- 6 payments?
- 7 MR. ZUCKER: Let me answer that this
- 8 way: In our recent rate case for Laclede Gas
- 9 Company, we actually asked to change the tariff to
- 10 allow us to change vendors if -- if we wished, and
- 11 what our goal was to change vendors without
- 12 changing the level of the credit score. In other
- 13 words, to get a similar score that turned out to be
- 14 similar to the original score but to be able to
- 15 change vendors if we got a better deal than with
- 16 the vendor we're tied to by the current tariff.
- 17 So I think the answer is that there
- 18 should be flexibility given to the utilities as to
- 19 which vendor they use and which credit score, but
- 20 what can be made uniform is about where you draw
- 21 the line. I mean, you can compare -- one company's
- 22 score might be 720 and the equivalent to that in
- 23 another company's score might be 800.
- 24 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: So you can make
- 25 some uniformity with respect to the thresholds and

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- 1 with respect to the criteria. I guess what I mean
- 2 by that is that it's an agency that is providing
- 3 credit scoring specifically relative to utility
- 4 payment and not just consumer payment in general.
- 5 You can use whatever vendor you want to get to that
- 6 point, but would there be some merit in specifying
- 7 that level of criteria in the rule?
- 8 MR. ZUCKER: Well, I think that the
- 9 more criteria you specify in the rule, the less
- 10 flexibility you have.
- 11 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Sure.
- 12 MR. ZUCKER: And I think it's
- 13 probably better to leave more flexibility,
- 14 especially in a situation where you have to come in
- 15 for a tariff anyway and that tariff is going to be
- 16 reviewed and, you know, it would give the utility
- 17 an opportunity to demonstrate that whatever
- 18 criteria and vendor they're bringing in is
- 19 appropriate.
- 20 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Thank you.
- 21 MR. ZUCKER: Okay. In Section 13.015
- 22 that's on the first page, page 1364 of the Missouri
- 23 Register, the consumer groups are worried that the
- 24 definition of rendition of an electronic bill could
- 25 be subject to abuse. I want to assure the

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- 1 Commission that in the definition of bill itself,
- 2 it says that a bill can be an electronic bill if
- 3 agreed to by the customer and the utility. So no
- 4 one's going to be forced into electronic billing if
- 5 they don't want to be, and we're certainly not
- 6 going to ask people to make electronic payments if
- 7 they're not prepared to do that.
- 8 Section 13.020, and I don't know
- 9 exactly what page that's on, but it's -- let's see.
- 10 Yes, I do. Page 1365. OPC made a comment in which
- 11 they seek to require utilities to use customer
- 12 reads. We are not far apart on this issue, but we
- 13 seek to be willing to use those reads where
- 14 necessary and appropriate. In other words, we want
- 15 to use them where we agree that they should be used
- 16 and not have the customer have the absolute right
- 17 to decide he's going to do his own reads.
- 18 The system as it was in the past when
- 19 we had meter readers, and Laclede specifically has
- 20 about 40 percent of its meters inside customer
- 21 homes, so that created a big problem, and it was
- 22 helpful for customers who chose to be able to read
- 23 meters, we would send them a card. They would
- 24 write down the number. They would send the card
- 25 back. We had people who would type in the number,

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- 1 and that's how we got readings.
- 2 It turned out the customers
- 3 weren't -- let's just say they weren't real good at
- 4 it. There was a high error rate. But, you know,
- 5 sometimes it worked pretty well.
- Now we have a system where we
- 7 don't -- where we get automated meter reads from
- 8 all of our meters that come in electronically by
- 9 cell and -- and we don't have the system anymore
- 10 where we have the cards that go out. So we can't
- 11 accommodate -- if a thousand people wanted to read
- 12 their own meters, we're not set up to accommodate
- 13 the back and forth and manual input.
- So we gave comments that said that we
- 15 preferred to incur -- well, our comments are that
- 16 it would be mutually agreeable to do reads because
- 17 there could be situations where we have trouble
- 18 getting a signal and it may be helpful to have the
- 19 customer read the meter. But in general, we prefer
- 20 to encourage the customer to cooperate with us in
- 21 helping us keep the remote meter reading device
- 22 working.
- 23 There's another comment by the
- 24 consumer groups in 13.020 to use the rules to
- 25 mandate preferred billing dates. In other words,

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- 1 customers could say what dates they want to be
- 2 billed on. Economics require us to spread bills
- 3 across a month and to group them in roughly
- 4 geographic manner. So we have -- for example,
- 5 Laclede has 18 billing cycles in a month. We're
- 6 sending out about 30 to 40,000 bills each cycle,
- 7 and then we're -- we're getting paid that way also.
- 8 And while we -- while it would be
- 9 nice to be able to give preferred billing dates, I
- 10 don't think it's appropriate for the rule to
- 11 mandate it. And if everybody, you know, wanted to
- 12 be billed at the end of the month, that would give
- 13 us a big problem.
- 14 Back to 13.015 on page 1364. There
- 15 are two definitions that kind of go together and,
- 16 in fact, they're right next to each other in the
- 17 rule. One is called inquiry, and the other is
- 18 called in dispute.
- 19 And we in the workshop tried to
- 20 change that rule to more accurately clarify the
- 21 difference between an inquiry and a dispute because
- 22 they -- there are different rules that apply to
- 23 when a customer makes an inquiry and when a
- 24 customer has a dispute.
- The rule as it is written now, as

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- 1 it's proposed is I don't think our greatest effort.
- 2 I don't know that it quite gets to where I would
- 3 have liked it to. And the point being that --
- 4 well, it kind of simplifies this. If a customer's
- 5 sentence ends in a question mark, that's an
- 6 inquiry. If a customer's sentence ends in an
- 7 exclamation point, that's probably a dispute. And
- 8 so it should be as simple as that, and we don't
- 9 want to mix inquiries and disputes.
- 10 Let's see. I think OPC proposed to
- 11 remove the word validity from the current pro--
- 12 from the proposed rule. That's basically the only
- 13 word in the rule for dispute that distinguishes a
- 14 dispute from an inquiry. So I think even though
- 15 the definition isn't as good as I'd like, I think
- 16 that makes it even worse to remove the word
- 17 validity.
- The other groups suggested
- 19 circumventing the entire private dispute process by
- 20 declaring a dispute to be a complaint under the
- 21 rules, and that's a third section. I don't think
- 22 that's appropriate at all. If there's a dispute,
- 23 it should be handled through the rules meant for
- 24 disputes and not -- not deemed a complaint.
- Rule 13.025, that's on page -- starts

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- 1 the bottom of 1366. The consumer groups seek to
- 2 change the length of an undercharge, when we've
- 3 undercharged a customer, how far we can go back to
- 4 bill them. Right now the rule is we can go back as
- 5 far as 12 months on making up an undercharge, and
- 6 that's where the rule stands today. The consumer
- 7 groups want to reduce it to six months.
- 8 We feel that 12 months strikes a fair
- 9 balance between how much we're going to charge when
- 10 we undercharge the customer versus the fact that
- 11 we'll go back five years to refund an overcharge.
- 12 So if we've overcharged the customer, we look back
- 13 five years to give them their money back. If we've
- 14 undercharged them, we look back one year. And we
- 15 think that's a good balance and the Commission
- 16 should keep it that way.
- 17 Rule 13.030 is on 1367. Office of
- 18 Public Counsel identified language in that rule
- 19 toward the bottom of 1367 that didn't look right to
- 20 them, and this language comes from a statute that
- 21 was passed in 2011 and is codified at 393.152. And
- 22 I think it was Staff's goal to drop the language of
- 23 that statute into Section 13.030(2)(C).
- And the point of that statute that's
- 25 now in the rule is that we have something called a

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- 1 poor pay deposit. If a customer is late on five
- 2 bills in a 12-month period, we can then say that
- 3 they're creating a risk of nonpayment and assess a
- 4 deposit.
- 5 What this rule says is, if a
- 6 customer's really making an effort to pay, they're
- 7 paying something every month, they're not too far
- 8 behind, you can't assess a deposit on them. And so
- 9 that's a reasonable balance, I think.
- 10 So the problem that OPC identified is
- 11 the language doesn't look right, and looking at it,
- 12 I think they have a point. We may need to review
- 13 that again to make sure it reads as the statute
- 14 intends.
- 13.050 Section 4, that is on page
- 16 1371 in the middle of the right column. This
- 17 section deals with disconnecting a customer who has
- 18 registered for electronic billing and notice. The
- 19 consumer groups seek to require the utilities to
- 20 send one hard copy notice or make a phone call to
- 21 the customer even though the customer has signed up
- 22 for electronic billing.
- So generally we make two contacts
- 24 with the customer before disconnection. The first
- one is more than ten days before disconnection, or

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- 1 at least ten days, and we would do that
- 2 electronically because the customer has requested
- 3 electronic notice. I think the consumer groups
- 4 have said, well, they may not be -- they may not
- 5 have their Internet service still if they're having
- 6 a problem, and so we'd like one notice to be in
- 7 hard copy.
- 8 And Laclede and MGE are willing to go
- 9 along with this rule change, but we made in our
- 10 comments on Monday some clarifications to the rule,
- just so it's clear what we're supposed to do.
- 12 Rule 13.055 is the Cold Weather Rule.
- 13 That is on page 1375. The consumer groups made a
- 14 few changes to this rule, including requiring extra
- 15 notices to persons who qualify for elderly and
- 16 disabled treatment under the Cold Weather Rule.
- 17 Let me make two comments about that.
- 18 First, the workshops and this rulemaking were
- 19 intended to modernize and sharpen the Chapter 13
- 20 rules without getting into the Cold Weather Rule,
- 21 which tends to be very controversial. Staff was
- 22 clear during the workshops that we weren't going to
- 23 open that Pandora's box.
- 24 My second point is that Laclede
- 25 actually does already place inserts about the

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- 1 elderly/disabled program in their bills before the
- 2 Cold Weather Rule period. We also do advertising,
- 3 and we provide forms to the community action
- 4 agencies. So I think we're already doing what the
- 5 consumer groups seek to apply in this rule. I just
- 6 don't think it's appropriate to put it there in
- 7 this rulemaking.
- 8 Okay. 13.050 is on page 1371.
- 9 Section 3 discusses the time during which a
- 10 disconnection can be made. It is being changed
- 11 from 8 to 4, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. to now 7 a.m. to
- 12 7 p.m. So those are the outside parameters for
- 13 when a disconnection can occur.
- 14 And they can -- and it also provides
- 15 that the utility must be accessible to receive a
- 16 restoration of service request at least one hour
- 17 after the disconnect timeframe. So if you want to
- 18 disconnect at 6:30, you have to be ready to take a
- 19 phone call at least until 7:30.
- The consumer groups seek to keep it
- 21 at 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. We at Laclede tend to stop
- 22 work around 6 p.m., but in the summer it is light
- 23 very late and it's light well past 7 o'clock, and
- 24 we think that it makes sense to have the rule allow
- 25 that. If you're going to do disconnections, you

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- 1 might as well do them efficiently, and the longer
- 2 day allows us to be more efficient.
- In addition, for the utilities who
- 4 are collecting money at the door, the off hours
- 5 tend to allow -- tend to have people be home more
- 6 when the disconnect -- when the service technician
- 7 arrives and gives them an opportunity to make their
- 8 payment.
- 9 Okay. 13.050 on page 1372,
- 10 Section -- what used to be Section 8 is now listed
- 11 as Section 10 about the middle of the right column.
- 12 This is called the door knock rule. So the rule
- 13 says, it talks about when a service technician goes
- 14 to disconnect service at someone's home, that they
- 15 knock on the door and tell the customer why they're
- 16 there.
- 17 Laclede and MGE have filed comments
- 18 in which they merely seek an option to either knock
- 19 on the door on the day of disconnection or place a
- 20 phone call to the customer.
- I notice that the consumer groups
- 22 also included a letter from, I believe, a physician
- 23 at Boston University that kind of addressed the
- 24 door knock rule. What I noticed about the letter
- 25 is that it really didn't seem to apply to the door

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- 1 knock rule. It looked like the knocking on the
- 2 door was kind of dropped in a few places, but it
- 3 didn't really address why that would be important.
- I think the consumer groups would say
- 5 that occasionally when the service technician's
- 6 knocking on the door he'll see that the person is
- 7 in poor health and can defer disconnection, for
- 8 example, under the medical deferral rule.
- 9 I would say that if we need someone
- 10 to visit houses to check on people, that our
- 11 service technicians are poor substitutes for social
- 12 workers. I don't think that requiring the knock on
- 13 the door is really going to be effective in that
- 14 sense. I don't know how many people we actually
- 15 refer, but I'm not sure it's very many.
- One thing I'd like to add is that
- 17 when you read the consumer groups' comments, they
- 18 consistently make claims that they're fighting for
- 19 consumer protections and that they're fighting
- 20 against erosion of consumer protections. I don't
- 21 buy this. The -- as I said, the rules should
- 22 strike a balance between the customers who pay the
- 23 bills and the customers who don't, and I think that
- 24 their view of consumer protections is anything that
- 25 coincides with their policy views and any position

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- 1 that disagrees with their views is an erosion of
- 2 consumer protections.
- 3 Throughout their comments, the
- 4 consumer groups have a common theme of suppressing
- 5 the utilities' ability to obtain deposits,
- 6 suppressing the ability to disconnect service and
- 7 to adjust billings. If their goal is to help our
- 8 most vulnerable customers, we share that goal, but
- 9 the way to do that is not by rigging the rules so
- 10 that those customers can maintain service longer
- 11 without paying for it. All that does is dig a
- 12 bigger hole for them to climb out of.
- 13 Laclede and MGE believe the best way
- 14 to help these customers who are unable to pay their
- 15 bills is to find the resources necessary to help
- 16 them reduce their debt. That's why it's important
- 17 for us to advocate for federal energy funding and
- 18 for the State of Missouri to fund the UtiliCare
- 19 program.
- That concludes my remarks. Thank you
- 21 very much, and we're available for questions if you
- 22 have any.
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: Mr. Chairman?
- 24 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: No. I think I
- 25 asked all the questions I was going to ask, but

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|----|--|---------|
| 1 | thanks, Mr. Zucker. | |
| 2 | JUDGE WOODRUFF: Commissioner Kenney? | |
| 3 | COMMISSIONER W. KENNEY: No | |
| 4 | questions. | |
| 5 | JUDGE WOODRUFF: Commissioner Hall? | |
| 6 | COMMISSIONER HALL: No questions. | |
| 7 | JUDGE WOODRUFF: Let's move on to | |
| 8 | another utility, then. I know KCPL GMO filed | |
| 9 | comments. Is there anyone here from KCPL GMO? | |
| 10 | Mr. Fischer. | |
| 11 | MR. FISCHER: May it please the | |
| 12 | Commission? My name is Jim Fischer, and I'm | |
| 13 | representing Kansas City Power & Light Company and | |
| 14 | KCPL Greater Missouri Operations Company in this | |
| 15 | proceeding, as well as others. Commissioner Hall, | |
| 16 | welcome to the bench. I hope you enjoy the new | |
| 17 | role. | |
| 18 | I guess I would concur initially with | |
| 19 | most of the comments that were just delivered by | |
| 20 | Mr. Zucker. We have been involved in this process | |
| 21 | for about seven years with Gay Fred and her team, | |
| 22 | and I would also commend Ms. Fred for all the hard | |
| 23 | work that she's done. | |
| 24 | Chapter 13, though, actually has a | |
| 25 | much longer history than just the seven years. I | |

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- 1 think if you look back at the end of the
- 2 regulations, they were actually -- Chapter 13 first
- 3 came into existence in 1975, even before I was
- 4 around. But I remember Judge -- we called them
- 5 Judges back in those days -- Commissioner Mulvaney
- 6 was very much involved in a major rewrite in 1977
- 7 that substantially changed and put into existence
- 8 our current Chapter 13.
- 9 Over the years there's been
- 10 controversy, but it's been largely related to the
- 11 cold weather aspects of the rule. For the most
- 12 part Chapter 13 has worked well, but I think we
- 13 probably haven't changed the rule in about 19 or 20
- 14 years in any major way, and it is time to update
- 15 the rule.
- 16 Staff has done a good job, I think,
- 17 of balancing the interests between the consumers
- 18 and the utilities and the other stakeholders
- 19 involved, and I would urge you to stay
- 20 substantially with the version Staff has proposed.
- 21 We at Kansas City Power & Light have
- 22 made some technical suggestions in our comments,
- 23 which I'd urge you to take a look at. I won't go
- 24 through them in any detail. But the one area, the
- 25 medical certification program is something that is

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- 1 new and I think is an improvement. We don't think
- 2 there needs to be the form that Staff is suggesting
- 3 in the -- in the regulation itself.
- We would urge you to allow us to use
- 5 an application process and have the application as
- 6 a part of it. That I think would improve it. Be
- 7 more flexible. We would go back to the physician
- 8 less often under that kind of a process. So I'd
- 9 ask you to take a look at our comments in that
- 10 regard.
- But for the most part I would just
- 12 concur with the comments that Mr. Zucker has raised
- 13 about some of the comments that were filed by the
- 14 Public Counsel or by some of the other consumer
- 15 groups and urge you to take a look at our technical
- 16 comments.
- 17 And I do have a couple of experts
- 18 with me. Allison Erickson is our subject matter
- 19 expert. I have Lois Lichty and I have Lisa Casteel
- 20 with me as well if you have some more technical
- 21 aspects that you'd like to get into or how does it
- 22 work in the field, what concerns do we have on the
- 23 ground in the trenches.
- So with that, I will stop and take
- 25 any questions that you might have.

Page 37 1 JUDGE WOODRUFF: Mr. Chairman? 2 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Mr. Fischer, thank 3 you. I'm going to ask the same question that I asked Mr. Zucker about the credit scoring and your 4 5 thoughts regarding the wisdom of the rule 6 specifying some -- some uniformity in terms of 7 insuring that the credit scoring is tailored towards measuring risk for not paying utility bills 8 versus some other risk. 10 MR. FISCHER: I think I would agree with what Mr. Zucker has said, but with your 11 12 deference and your permission, I would let -- or request that Allison Erickson address that more 13 directly. She's at the microphone back here. 14 15 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Sure. 16 JUDGE WOODRUFF: Ms. Erickson, why 17 don't you go ahead and come up to the podium? MS. ERICKSON: Thank you. I would 18 agree with Mr. Zucker in regards to utilizing the 19 credit scoring. And correct me if I'm wrong, but 20 21 you were asking if we would define in the rule the applicable method or --22 23 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Well, I think what Mr. Zucker was saying was that the rule should 24 maintain some level of flexibility, and I think I'd 25

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- 1 probably agree with that, too. My question was
- 2 whether it would be advisable to have some measure
- 3 of uniformity so that the -- so that all of our
- 4 utilities are using a vendor that supplies credit
- 5 scoring specifically related to measuring risk for
- 6 not payment of utility bills as opposed to
- 7 measuring some other risk.
- 8 So I would agree to allow utilities
- 9 the flexibility to choose the vendor, but I wonder
- 10 if there would be any advisability to have at least
- 11 some measure of uniformity specified in the rule
- 12 itself.
- MS. ERICKSON: That could certainty
- 14 be considered. You know, again, I don't know that
- 15 all utilities actually do reporting to the credit
- 16 bureaus for our current customers. It's usually
- 17 after it's gone to a bad debt status and it's sent
- 18 off to a third-party agency that reporting is
- 19 actually done.
- 20 But I know not all utilities actually
- 21 participate in providing active customer payment
- 22 history, and that's one thing that would have to be
- 23 considered.
- 24 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: That's different,
- 25 though. We're talking about using credit scoring

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- 1 for purposes of establishing deposits. You're
- 2 talking about reporting payment history to credit
- 3 bureaus. I think that's slightly different than
- 4 what we're talking about.
- 5 MS. ERICKSON: Okay. And what I'm
- 6 understanding the question to be -- and maybe I'm
- 7 misunderstanding, I apologize -- is that if we are
- 8 using a model that strictly shows how a consumer
- 9 pays their utility bills --
- 10 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: For purposes of
- 11 establishing deposits.
- MS. ERICKSON: Absolutely.
- 13 Absolutely. But again, a utility has to report how
- 14 that consumer has paid their utility bills, and
- 15 that's the point I'm trying to stress is that not
- 16 all utilities report that payment history on their
- 17 active customers.
- 18 It's certainly something -- and I
- 19 really am very interested in the model that Laclede
- 20 has because that does actually focus on the area of
- 21 concern for us as a utility.
- 22 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: And that's the area
- 23 of concern that we want you to be concerned about.
- MS. ERICKSON: Absolutely. Yes.
- 25 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Okay. So I don't

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- 1 want to put words in your mouth, but it sounds like
- 2 you agree with me that the utilities in assessing
- 3 whether and how much of a deposit to assess should
- 4 be looking at risk related to nonpayment of utility
- 5 bills and not just a generalized credit risk?
- 6 MS. ERICKSON: I think there is
- 7 benefit in that, but again, it's going to -- my
- 8 concern would be how much is actually reported.
- 9 And I would have to really have more understanding
- 10 of that model before I could give an opinion on
- 11 that.
- 12 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Okay. Thank you.
- MS. ERICKSON: You're welcome.
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: Commissioner Kenney?
- 15 COMMISSIONER W. KENNEY: No.
- MR. FISCHER: Thank you very much.
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: Thank you,
- 18 Mr. Fischer and Ms. Erickson. Is there anyone else
- 19 here on behalf of a utility?
- MS. GIBONEY: Yes, for Ameren
- 21 Missouri.
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: Mr. Mitten, you
- 23 jumped up first.
- MR. MITTEN: I jumped up first.
- 25 Thank you. If it please the Commission? My name

Page 41 is Russ Mitten. I'm appearing here this morning on 2 behalf of the Empire District Electric Company. 3 Empire agrees with the position that the joint utilities have taken in the comments that 4 5 were filed earlier this week. We echo many of the comments that Mr. Zucker made earlier today, and 6 7 I'm going to try and avoid repeating those. 8 But one point I do want to emphasize, 9 and that is I would urge the Commission, in considering changes to the current rules, not to 10 swing the pendulum too far in favor of the minority 11 12 of customers who either don't pay their bills or 13 don't pay their bills on time as opposed to the overwhelming majority of customers that do. 14 15 Mr. Fischer referenced a rulemaking proceeding back in 1977 when these rules were first 16 17 considered. I'm old enough to have actually participated in that rulemaking proceeding as a 18 Staff lawyer, and I remember one of the concerns 19 20 that I had both as an attorney for the Staff and 21 also a utility consumer was back then I thought the Commission had bent over backwards too far in 22 favoring the interests of the small minority of 23 24 customers who didn't pay their bills.

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I think the revisions that have been

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- 1 proposed by the Staff in this particular rulemaking
- 2 do a really good job of moving that pendulum back
- 3 in the direction favoring the customers who do pay
- 4 their bills.
- 5 Bad debt is a real problem for both
- 6 utilities and ultimately for the customers who have
- 7 to pay that bad debt expense as part of the revenue
- 8 requirement that's used to set rates. I think the
- 9 utilities should be allowed to take reasonable
- 10 measures to minimize the amount of bad debt
- 11 experience that they're likely to have.
- 12 And I think the rules that have been
- 13 proposed by the Staff in this case, with some minor
- 14 tweaking as proposed by the utilities, go a long
- 15 way in bringing the pendulum back into a position
- 16 where bad debt expense is going to be mitigated.
- 17 If I can address some of the specific
- 18 comments that have been made by other parties in
- 19 the case, I would like to do so. In the
- 20 definitions section 4 CSR 240-13.015, the joint
- 21 commenters have proposed a change to the definition
- 22 of payment. Empire is opposed to that change. The
- 23 definition already defines the term to mean cash,
- 24 draft or electronic transfer, and it leaves the
- option up to the customer as to which of those

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- 1 means they prefer to use at least initially to pay
- 2 their bill.
- 3 However, by requiring there be an
- 4 agreement between the utility and the consumer as
- 5 to which of those means will be used, that takes
- 6 away some flexibility that the utilities need to --
- 7 in order to be able to mitigate their bad debt
- 8 experience.
- 9 For example, if a customer repeatedly
- 10 pays his or her utility bill with a bad check, the
- 11 utility should have the ability, without the
- 12 customer's agreement, to say we're not going to
- 13 take your checks anymore, we want the payment made
- 14 in cash or via electronic transfer.
- The rule as it's currently proposed
- 16 by Staff allows that flexibility. The changes that
- 17 are proposed by the joint commenters would take
- 18 that flexibility away.
- 19 I also would like to address the
- 20 deposit rule and perhaps some of the questions that
- 21 Commissioner -- or that Chairman Kenney has asked.
- 22 We believe that utilities ought to be allowed to
- 23 use credit scores to determine the creditworthiness
- 24 of applicants for service, to determine whether or
- 25 not those customers should be required to provide a

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- 1 deposit for service.
- Now, I have talked to Ann Butz, who
- 3 is the head of the customer service department at
- 4 Empire, and Chairman Kenney, we're not aware of any
- 5 credit scoring agency that slices and dices credit
- 6 scores in the way that you've suggested to focus
- 7 exclusively on whether or not customers pay their
- 8 utility service.
- 9 We believe that credit scores
- 10 represent an overall view of the creditworthiness
- 11 of a potential customer. It looks at the
- 12 customer's payment history, but it also looks at
- 13 other things, like the debt load that that customer
- 14 is carrying and whether or not that debt load
- 15 suggests that the customer would be able to take on
- 16 new obligations and meet the payment requirements
- 17 of those new financial obligations.
- 18 We also believe that credit scores
- 19 when they're available are a far better indicator
- 20 of whether or not a customer is going to be
- 21 creditworthy than the inferences that can be drawn
- 22 from the four criteria that are in the current rule
- 23 and it would be carried over to a new rule.
- 24 Certainly it's possible that you can
- 25 infer from the fact that somebody is buying a house

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- 1 or has a current job or has a source of -- a
- 2 regular source of income that that person is going
- 3 to be a good credit risk, but a credit score is
- 4 based upon facts. It's based upon the actual
- 5 payment record of a customer. And we believe that
- 6 that factual information is far better than the
- 7 inferences that can be drawn from the criteria that
- 8 are in the current rule.
- 9 So if a credit score is available for
- 10 a customer, we believe that the utility should be
- 11 allowed to use that credit score in determining
- 12 whether or not a deposit should be required.
- 13 You also need to take into
- 14 consideration the fact that even if you look at the
- 15 fact that a person has a current job or is buying a
- 16 house or has a regular source of income, that
- 17 customer can still have a bad credit score. And
- 18 again, when you've got conflicting data like that,
- 19 factual data versus inferential data, we believe
- 20 the utility should be allowed to use that factual
- 21 data in determining whether or not a deposit should
- 22 be required.
- 23 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: May I ask you a
- 24 question about that point?
- MR. MITTEN: Certainly.

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- 1 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: So as I understood
- 2 Mr. Zucker, Laclede Gas' model does focus on risk
- 3 of nonpayment of utility bills as opposed to just a
- 4 generalized risk of creditworthiness. So you're
- 5 saying Empire's not aware of any credit reporting
- 6 agencies that slice and dice with that level of
- 7 specificity, but as I'm understanding what
- 8 Mr. Zucker said, it exists.
- 9 And so my question then is -- and
- 10 this was the same question I asked Mr. Zucker --
- 11 does taking a generalized consumer credit score
- 12 recognize that the purchasing of utilities services
- is not the same as the purchasing of other consumer
- 14 goods? So is there a study that shows that a
- 15 generalized measurement of credit risk is an
- 16 accurate measure of a person's payment and risk
- 17 with respect to the payment of utility bills?
- 18 MR. MITTEN: Well, I don't know if
- 19 there's a study that shows that. I do know that if
- 20 you look at the way credit scores are used, if I go
- 21 to apply for a mortgage or a consumer loan or go to
- 22 buy a car, I don't think they slice and dice my
- 23 credit score to determine whether or not it
- 24 indicates that I'm likely to make my mortgage
- 25 payments on time as opposed to pay other bills on

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- 1 time. And I think the realities of the way credit
- 2 scores are used outside the utility industry ought
- 3 to apply inside the utility industry as well.
- 4 Empire's happy to talk to Laclede,
- 5 and if Laclede has a vendor that is able to focus
- 6 on a customer's likelihood of paying his or her
- 7 utility bill, certainly that's something we're
- 8 willing to consider. But I don't know that any of
- 9 that information was available in the workshops.
- 10 And if the Commission decides it
- 11 wants to adopt something like that, I think more
- 12 investigation, maybe more workshops are needed for
- 13 that particular facet. But in the interim, I think
- 14 the proposal to allow the utilities to use credit
- 15 scores generally is vastly superior to the
- 16 situation that exists today under the current rule.
- 17 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: I would agree if
- 18 the credit scoring is measuring the risk that it's
- 19 supposed to measure, and I'm relatively certain
- 20 that the credit risk for purposes -- or the
- 21 credit -- the way that the credit scoring is
- 22 utilized in one context for purchasing a home and a
- 23 mortgage is not the same as for purchasing a car
- 24 and it's -- because the transactions are different
- 25 from purchasing consumer goods from Macy's. One's

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- 1 a secured transaction. One's unsecured. So the
- 2 risk tolerance by the lender is different. I can't
- 3 point to any study. I'm just relatively certain
- 4 that that's the case.
- 5 So I think if you just have this
- 6 blanket generalization with respect to credit
- 7 scoring, it doesn't take into account that buying
- 8 utility services is different than buying a coat
- 9 from Macy's, and a consumer's risk of nonpayment of
- 10 one is not the same as the risk of not paying the
- 11 other.
- 12 So I agree that an objective measure
- 13 like a credit score as a general proposition is
- 14 more accurate than maybe some other subjective
- 15 measure, but I think we have to be certain that the
- 16 risk that's being measured is the risk that we are
- 17 concerned about.
- 18 Mr. Zucker?
- 19 MR. ZUCKER: Thank you, Chairman.
- 20 Let me amend something I said because I don't want
- 21 to give you the wrong impression. The index we use
- 22 for credit scoring is called the Equifax Utility
- 23 Index. My understanding is -- and we have David
- 24 Hendershot here from MGE who also uses that same
- 25 index and can maybe talk to it in more detail than

Page 49 1 me. 2 My understanding is, while it's meant 3 to correlate to utility payment, it doesn't -- it's not just exclusive utility. The facts that go in 4 5 are not exclusively utility information. But when we did testing on it, they were able to predict 6 7 with a pretty high level of correlation who -based on their score they gave the customer, how 8 that customer would perform, and so --10 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Would perform with respect to payment of utility bills? 11 12 MR. ZUCKER: Yes. 13 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: So the inputs may look at a person's payment of a variety of 14 15 different consumer bills and mortgage payments, so the inputs are the same, but they're measuring 16 17 specifically the risk of payment or nonpayment of 18 utility service? It's not a generalized consumer credit score? 19 MR. ZUCKER: That's correct. The 20 21 inputs -- I mean, there's a lot of inputs, and they 22 may choose among them and see which ones come out to be the best predictors of utility payment. And 23 24 then we tested it, and I can enter this if you --25 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: When you say you

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- 1 tested it, what does that mean? Laclede tested it?
- 2 MR. ZUCKER: That means, for example,
- 3 for calendar 2012 we looked at about 23,000
- 4 turn ons done, and based on the -- here's the --
- 5 okay. Based on what happened after those customers
- 6 were turned on, we aggregated how they did by
- 7 credit score, and the credit scores -- the
- 8 customers with the lowest credit scores had the
- 9 highest defaults, and the customers with the
- 10 highest credit scores had the lowest defaults.
- 11 And so it -- it correlated very well,
- 12 and you can see and then you can draw a line based
- on how much risk you want to take in terms of the
- 14 threshold for whether to take a deposit or not.
- 15 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Yeah, I'd like to
- 16 enter that. I'd like to see it.
- 17 MR. ZUCKER: Do you guys want to see
- 18 this? I don't have any other copies of it.
- 19 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: I don't have to see
- 20 it today.
- 21 MR. ZUCKER: I think this is it.
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: Mr. Zucker, we're
- 23 going to mark this as Exhibit 1.
- 24 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Can I ask you a
- 25 question now that you provided this?

Page 51 1 MR. ZUCKER: Yes. 2 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: So the consumer 3 reporting agency generates a score, and then Laclede is free to decide where along the scale 4 5 it's going to accept a deposit. So below this 6 score we will demand a deposit. Above this score 7 we will not. How do you determine what that be? MR. ZUCKER: Well, that would be nice 8 if Laclede was able to decide, but what happened was we filed a tariff and then negotiated it with 10 the parties that would like to have drawn the line 11 12 in a different spot than we did, and we came to a 13 compromise. 14 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Got you. Would it 15 be -- well, never mind. I won't ask you that. I apologize. Thank you. This is helpful. 16 17 (LACLEDE EXHIBIT NO. 1 WAS MARKED FOR 18 IDENTIFICATION BY THE REPORTER.) 19 MR. MITTEN: If I could just say one concluding thing regarding the credit score. I'll 20 21 concede that a credit score is an imperfect indicator of whether or not a customer is going to 22 23 pay his utility bill or his mortgage payment or any other particular payment in a given month, but I 24 think it's a considerably less imperfect indicator 25

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- 1 than the four criteria that are in the rule right
- 2 now.
- 3 One final point that I would like to
- 4 make regarding the proposed rule has to do with the
- 5 medical safeguards. I think Mr. Zucker mentioned
- 6 earlier that there's a lot of new proposals in the
- 7 version of the rule that we were asked to comment
- 8 on. I would add that many if not most of those new
- 9 proposals were not discussed in the workshops that
- 10 led up to the rule being proposed.
- 11 Empire believes that the current rule
- 12 is working, and if the Commission believes that
- 13 additional changes need to be made to the current
- 14 rule, then we would ask that you set up a separate
- 15 rulemaking with some additional workshops so that
- 16 additional proposals can be considered in those
- 17 workshops and hopefully a consensus proposal can be
- 18 made in the form of amendments to the current rule.
- 19 Again, the changes that are being
- 20 proposed to the rule are very significant. We
- 21 don't believe some of them are going to work
- 22 particularly well, but we'd like to have the
- 23 opportunity to talk among the parties about those
- 24 proposed changes either in another rulemaking
- 25 proceeding or in workshops working up to a

Page 53 rulemaking proceeding. 2 I don't have any further comments. 3 Like I said, I echo the comments that have been made by the other utility parties thus far, but I 4 5 would be happy to answer any questions from the Bench if there are any. 6 7 JUDGE WOODRUFF: Mr. Chairman? 8 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: No, thank you. Thanks, Mr. Mitten. 10 MR. MITTEN: Thank you. 11 JUDGE WOODRUFF: Commissioner Kenney? 12 COMMISSIONER W. KENNEY: No. 13 JUDGE WOODRUFF: Commissioner Hall? 14 COMMISSIONER HALL: No. 15 JUDGE WOODRUFF: Let's move to Ameren 16 then. 17 MS. GIBONEY: Good morning. I'm Sarah Giboney. I'm the attorney representing 18 Ameren Missouri this morning, and I also represent 19 the company in the consumer complaints that are 20 21 filed with the Commission. I'd like to echo the thanks and the 22 23 recognition that Rick Zucker offered this morning. 24 I feel like I haven't been around very long because I've only been involved in the workshops I think 25

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- 1 since 2007, 2009. So I don't have quite the amount
- 2 of experience that the other attorneys do.
- In general, Ameren Missouri believes
- 4 that most of the changes to Chapter 13 that were
- 5 proposed by Staff, that they also have effectively
- 6 modernized the rules to reflect technological
- 7 advances and that they do maintain that balance
- 8 between the concerns of the utilities' residential
- 9 customers and the concerns of regulated utilities,
- 10 and we would say not just the concerns of good pay
- 11 versus bad pay customers but all customers and the
- 12 concerns of regulated utilities.
- The company is happy to support most
- 14 of the changes, but it is concerned that a number
- of the suggestions for additional changes to
- 16 Chapter 13 that have been suggested by the consumer
- 17 groups, that those do, you know, get us out of
- 18 balance with the purpose of the rules and with the
- 19 purpose of Staff's changes. We don't think they
- 20 would result in the fair compromise that Staff said
- 21 it sought to achieve when it modernized the rules.
- 22 I'll be introducing Kathy Hart.
- 23 She's the customer services supervisor for Ameren.
- 24 Kathy lives and breathes these rules. She looks at
- 25 them every day all day long, and she really has a

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- 1 good understanding of the effects and sometimes the
- 2 possible side effects to the way a rule is
- 3 interpreted and has a good understanding of the
- 4 problems that might result from some of these rules
- 5 unintentionally, the suggested rules.
- 6 So I'm going to let Kathy speak
- 7 specifically to our comments.
- 8 MS. HART: Thank you. I appreciate
- 9 that. As Sarah said, my name is Kathy Hart, and
- 10 I'm just going to go through some of the things
- 11 that Ameren -- I'd like to respond to some of the
- 12 comments and the changes from Staff.
- The first one would be on page 1364
- 14 in the Missouri Register, and it would be under
- 15 payment. In response to the Staff changes, we are
- 16 okay with the minor change. Ameren believes that
- 17 cash, draft or electronic transfer should be
- 18 changed to cash, draft of good and sufficient funds
- 19 or electronic transfer, or to cash, draft that has
- 20 not been dishonored or electronic transfer, to make
- 21 clear that a check that does not clear is not a
- 22 payment.
- 23 We'd also like to respond to that
- 24 same topic with the comment from OPC disagrees
- 25 with -- we disagree with OPC if it is suggesting

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- 1 that customers whose checks have been dishonored on
- 2 repeat occasions should always have the option of
- 3 paying by draft. Because the definition does not
- 4 address options, just defines what constitutes a
- 5 payment, Ameren believes the definition amended as
- 6 Ameren suggests is sufficient.
- 7 The next one would be 13.020, and
- 8 that's on page 1365 of the Register, billing and
- 9 payment standards, and this would be 2A, 1 through
- 10 7. This is in response to Staff changes. Ameren
- 11 supports these changes which reflect all -- reflect
- 12 that although technology that has come about since
- 13 the rules were last amended generally improves
- 14 efficiency and reduces the cost through AMR,
- 15 sometimes it may fail and may result in the need to
- 16 base a bill on estimated usage.
- 17 Ameren's number of estimated bills is
- 18 very, very low in comparison. In fact, this year
- 19 up to date we have 574 complaints. Seven of
- 20 those -- we had a total of nine which would be --
- 21 which would be failings. Two of those were
- 22 customer repairs that were needed, and seven of
- 23 those were stop meters. So our numbers are very
- 24 low as far as this is concerned.
- In response to OPC's comments, we

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- 1 disagree with OPC's conclusion that the changes
- 2 proposed by Staff diminish a utility's
- 3 responsibility to obtain actual reads. The rules
- 4 would provide for use of customer-supplied readings
- 5 where viable, for instance. Again, utilities are
- 6 motivated to bill for the amount of service
- 7 actually provided.
- 8 Ameren does not believe there is any
- 9 factual support for OPC's argument that the
- 10 proposed changes will lead to an increase in the
- 11 number of customer complaints over estimated bills.
- The next one would be 13.020(7),
- 13 mandatory preferred billing dates. Ameren Missouri
- 14 opposes any mandate that customers be able to
- 15 choose their billing date. Allowing customers to
- 16 choose billing dates will result in inefficiencies
- 17 in billing, issuing notices and doing field work,
- 18 and could raise cash flow concerns.
- 19 We want to mirror some of the
- 20 comments before through some of the other utilities
- 21 that we do bill in groups for a reason because of
- 22 our flow of bills out and the cash flow back in.
- 23 So we're not able to really handle all of those at
- 24 one particular time of the month if that's where
- 25 someone would choose to land.

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- 1 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Can I ask a
- 2 question about that, about allowing a customer to
- 3 choose their billing date? I know credit card
- 4 companies do that. Is there any indication or
- 5 evidence that by allowing a customer to choose
- 6 their billing date, that would reduce your bad
- 7 debt, I mean, if they pick a date on which they're
- 8 better able to pay it?
- 9 Because I think the whole point
- 10 behind that is allowing them to set it so it
- 11 coincides with payday. I wonder if there's an
- 12 increase in bill payments and a decrease in bad
- 13 debt if you allow them to pick their pay date, if
- 14 that's been looked at.
- MS. HART: You know, I don't know
- 16 that there's been a study. I'm not aware of it. I
- do know some of the people who have asked is
- 18 because they get paid on the 3rd of the month or
- 19 something like that. But typically, you know, I
- 20 just don't know. I don't want to say there's been
- 21 a study when I'm not sure about that.
- 22 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Is there a real
- 23 concern or legitimate concern that everybody's
- 24 going to start picking the same date and there will
- 25 be a rush? I think the concern is that it messes

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- 1 up your cash flow if everybody were to pay at the
- 2 end of the month. Is that -- is there some
- 3 indication that that's actual, that that would
- 4 actually happen?
- 5 MS. HART: Well, if we opened it up,
- 6 I don't know. We've never opened it up for them to
- 7 do that just because we have everything set out,
- 8 you know, certain bill groups we're going to run
- 9 certain areas. We have to be able to do that. For
- 10 one thing, I don't think we could handle the flow
- 11 back in, like I said. We've never opened it up to
- 12 do that because I don't think it would work.
- We have a lot of bills that go out.
- 14 You know, 700 per minute I think was the last --
- 15 whenever we're running those bills, and so for us
- 16 to -- because we have so many customers, for us to
- 17 get those all at one time, I can't imagine that it
- 18 would work. I can't give you any specifics because
- 19 I don't think there's been a study, but we could
- 20 see by looking at the number of customers and we're
- 21 actually going to have to state when the bills are
- 22 going to be paid.
- 23 And it's really due to area. We have
- 24 a lot of field work that goes on per area as well.
- 25 So it's not just the cash flow.

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- 1 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Okay. Thank you.
- MS. HART: Uh-huh. The next one that
- 3 I'd like to speak about would be 13.020(14), and
- 4 that was payday loan sites, and I think that was --
- 5 those were some comments by AARP and some of the
- 6 consumer groups.
- 7 We oppose the proposed rule that
- 8 would ban the formal pay agent relationships.
- 9 There are certain -- there's a lot of areas that we
- 10 have that are rural, and in order for us to provide
- 11 the pay stations for customers to make it
- 12 convenient for them to go make their payments, if
- 13 we were not to use some of those payday loan sites,
- 14 they would have nowhere to make their payments.
- 15 They would actually -- it would cut down on their
- 16 options. Some of them would have to drive as much
- 17 as 50 miles to even get to a good payday loan -- or
- 18 to a good pay station site.
- 19 So we feel like we're -- we're
- 20 actually trying to give the customer some type of
- 21 option to make that payment. So that's why we feel
- 22 like we would like to go ahead and use those really
- 23 when we have to.
- The next one would be 13.025, and
- 25 that's on Missouri Register page 1367, 1C. This is

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- 1 in regards to the service and billing practices for
- 2 the undercharges. Ameren Missouri believes the
- 3 Staff's proposed change to allow a customer to pay
- 4 an adjusted bill that resulted from an undercharge
- 5 over a period double the period covered by the
- 6 adjusted bill will result in an imbalance between
- 7 the concerns of the customer and of the utility.
- 8 These interests are balanced in
- 9 Ameren's tariffs, which allow a 12-month look back
- 10 to bill for undercharges but a five-year look back
- 11 for a customer to obtain a credit for overcharges.
- 12 Allowing a period at least equal to the time
- 13 covered by the corrected bill, leaving the utility
- 14 to agree to a longer period in special
- 15 circumstances seems more balanced.
- In addition, Ameren believes the
- 17 provisions should include a reference to a payment
- 18 agreement. That is, payment of an undercharge
- 19 should be made in installments over a certain
- 20 period of time, not just come due at the end of the
- 21 period.
- 22 Ameren recommends saying, in the
- 23 event of an undercharge, the utility shall offer
- the customer the option to pay the adjusted bill
- 25 pursuant to a payment agreement under which the

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- 1 customer may pay the amount in equal monthly
- 2 installments over a period at least equal to the
- 3 period covered by the adjusted bill.
- 4 The next response I'd like to make
- 5 would be to some comments made by OPC. We strongly
- 6 oppose OPC's proposal to shorten the undercharge
- 7 adjustment period to six months. Ratepayers are
- 8 not served when the utilities do not collect
- 9 charges for services provided.
- In addition, OPC is misinformed when
- 11 it suggests that all that is needed to resolve
- 12 faulty meter issues immediately is incentive. In
- 13 certain circumstances, such as customers with
- 14 variable usage, it's difficult to detect in just
- 15 six months if a meter is faulty or if a remote
- 16 meter reading device has failed.
- 17 I'll give you an example. If we have
- 18 a gas customer who in the month of January, if
- 19 their meter failed in January, after three
- 20 consecutive billings of zero use then we would go
- 21 out for a field check. If it happened in January
- 22 and the first card, the zero card did not come out
- 23 for us to look at until February, February, March
- 24 would have been No. 2, month one and then month
- 25 two. In April we go back -- we go out of that. So

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- 1 we would not have looked again until after
- 2 September. And so that may just fall back into the
- 3 next winter period, variable use, zero use period.
- 4 So that's really how it can go from one season into
- 5 the next before we're actually able to see those.
- 6 So that's just an example.
- 7 COMMISSIONER W. KENNEY: May I ask a
- 8 question? I want to go back a second. You were
- 9 talking about those predatory lenders. Did I hear
- 10 you say that some customers would have to drive up
- 11 to 50 miles because you can't come to an
- 12 arrangement with another company to accept
- 13 payments?
- MS. HART: Well, I'm saying -- now,
- 15 they could -- we have speed pay, which is Western
- 16 Union, and they can call. But if they actually
- 17 want to go to a location to pay a bill, yes, they
- 18 could drive that far, if we did not have -- we have
- 19 a hard time in some rural areas finding someone to
- 20 actually make our payments through.
- 21 COMMISSIONER W. KENNEY: Like a
- 22 grocery store? Like a --
- MS. HART: Right. Right. A lot
- 24 of -- in smaller towns, we have problems finding
- 25 someone who's interested to take the payments.

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- 1 Now, I'm not saying that the customer would not be
- 2 able to call those in. They can. They can go in
- 3 through the website.
- 4 COMMISSIONER W. KENNEY: I don't see
- 5 many predatory lenders in rural areas. I don't see
- 6 many -- I see most predatory lenders in cities.
- 7 MS. HART: Well, we have -- we have
- 8 some areas, and they're maybe not as big of cities
- 9 as St. Louis, but we have some areas that we're not
- 10 able to find anyone to take those payments. We do
- 11 have other options, though, but a lot of times, you
- 12 know, people will like to go to a store right there
- in their town and pay the bill.
- 14 COMMISSIONER W. KENNEY: I know, but
- 15 a store is different than, I think, than the
- 16 consumers were talking about and some of these
- 17 groups. I just think -- I'm just aware of it
- 18 because I remember from the Legislature dealing
- 19 with those types of groups. It's a business and I
- 20 understand the need for some consumers, but I was
- 21 just curious when I heard that statement. I'm sure
- 22 utilities could probably find some arrangements
- 23 other than predatory lenders, I would think.
- MS. HART: Well, we do our best to --
- 25 and we give other options, and we're always trying

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- 1 to give other options, like I said, through our
- 2 website or speed pay. They can always call in.
- 3 But if they do want to actually go to a location
- 4 and make their payment, sometimes we have to use
- 5 whoever we can get from that particular location.
- 6 COMMISSIONER W. KENNEY: Okay. Thank
- 7 you.
- 8 MS. HART: At this time to comment on
- 9 13.030(1)(A), and this is regard to the credit
- 10 scoring. At this time we do not have credit
- 11 scoring. We agree with Rick Zucker's comments that
- 12 because a tariff would have to be filed and
- 13 approved, the Commission would have an opportunity
- 14 to determine if the scoring range and vendors were
- 15 appropriate.
- 16 At this time the company does not
- 17 report nonpayment of utility bills to the credit
- 18 agencies.
- 19 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: I'm going to ask
- 20 you the same question I've asked everybody. Do you
- 21 have an opinion about the need for uniformity with
- 22 respect to not necessarily the vendor but the
- 23 outputs from the credit scoring and that it should
- 24 be tailored toward assessing risk for payment or
- 25 nonpayment of utility bills?

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- 1 MS. HART: Honestly, because we don't
- 2 use this right now, I don't have a lot of detail on
- 3 that. I know that -- I do just know that we don't
- 4 report the nonpayment. I would say anything that
- 5 the -- you know, like I stated, if the
- 6 Commission -- it has to be approved by the
- 7 Commission, then they're going to be able to set
- 8 the ranges for the scoring. But I don't really
- 9 have an opinion as far as that because we don't use
- 10 it.
- 11 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Fair enough. Thank
- 12 you.
- 13 MS. HART: The next one I'd like to
- 14 address is 13.035, No. 1, and that's denial in
- 15 writing. Staff changes -- Ameren objects to the
- 16 requirement that a utility inform an applicant in
- 17 writing if requested that the utility refuses to
- 18 provide service.
- 19 Ameren cannot identify any current
- 20 deficiency that would be fixed or any other clear
- 21 purpose that would be served by adding this
- 22 requirement, but it would add to the cost of
- 23 service.
- The next one would be discontinuance
- of service, extending hours, and that would be

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- 1 13.050(3). In response to OPC's comments, OPC
- 2 opposes extending the hours during which a utility
- 3 can disconnect. However, there is a balance in the
- 4 rules between a utility's opportunity to disconnect
- 5 and a customer's opportunity to have service
- 6 restored by providing that a utility cannot
- 7 disconnect unless a utility is accessible to
- 8 receive restoration request at least an hour after
- 9 the disconnect.
- 10 OPC's argument that extending into
- 11 evening hours may deprive a customer of the ability
- 12 to contact social service agencies is not supported
- 13 for the reason that by the time the customer is
- 14 facing disconnection, the customer has had days to
- 15 contact the agencies for help.
- 16 The next one would be No. 4, and that
- 17 would be allowing electronic notices. Staff
- 18 changes, Ameren is generally supportive but
- 19 believes the provision needs to be reworded
- 20 slightly as recommended in the comments of the
- 21 Missouri utilities. Because electronic --
- 22 electronic notices are in writing and because the
- 23 provision refers to sending a notice 96 hours prior
- 24 to discontinuance rather than at least 96 hours
- 25 prior to discontinuance and to a phone call 24

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- 1 hours prior to discontinuance rather than at least
- 2 24 hours prior to discontinuance.
- 3 The next one would be 13.050, No. 10,
- 4 and this is the knock on the door. Staff did not
- 5 change this provision. We feel strongly that the
- 6 field personnel should not be required to contact
- 7 the customer and identify themselves and the
- 8 purpose of their presence for safety reasons.
- 9 In addition, if a physical visit to
- 10 the premises is not required in order to disconnect
- 11 service, field personnel should not be required to
- 12 visit the premises just for the purpose of leaving
- 13 written notification about the discontinuance and
- 14 steps to restore service. This can be addressed by
- 15 a follow-up writing or a phone call. Remote
- 16 disconnects will improve efficiency and should be
- 17 encouraged.
- 18 Because the customer has ample
- 19 advance notice of the disconnect and can be given
- 20 notice afterwards in manners just as effective as a
- 21 door hanger, this rule should be revised.
- 22 And then the next one would be
- 23 13.055(11), and I just want to state that we feel
- 24 there are several difficulties with this change,
- 25 and we would like to see this -- we would like to

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- 1 see where this would not go forward. There needs
- 2 to be a workshop on it or something set up for more
- 3 discussion, but right now we can just see a lot of
- 4 difficulties with the changing of this physician's
- 5 certificate in 055.
- And that's all that I have, so that's
- 7 the end of my remarks. Do you have any questions
- 8 for me?
- 9 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: No. Thank you.
- 10 Thanks for your time.
- 11 JUDGE WOODRUFF: Commissioner Hall?
- 12 COMMISSIONER HALL: One question.
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: We have one question
- 14 for you.
- 15 COMMISSIONER HALL: On the
- 16 physician's certificate, how common is that?
- 17 MS. HART: Well, if -- for a medical
- 18 hardship, and we offer medical hardship one every
- 19 12 rolling months, it's pretty common that -- what
- 20 we request is that someone send us a statement, a
- 21 doctor's statement, and we want to make sure that
- 22 it's something that would be life-threatening, you
- 23 know, to the customer to not have that service
- 24 turned off.
- So your question is how often do they

Page 70 call in for that? Quite often. We have -- we have 2 several of those probably a day. 3 COMMISSIONER HALL: Is it possible to 4 get an actual number? 5 MS. HART: I could get you an actual number. I don't know off the top of my head. 6 7 COMMISSIONER HALL: Okay. 8 MS. HART: I can definitely do that. And then we make sure -- you know, we make sure that all the information that we've received from 10 11 the customer is correct, and then we'll go ahead 12 and we'll enter it in the computer, and we put it 13 in and that's their one per 12 months. But yeah, I'd be glad to get that for you. 14 15 JUDGE WOODRUFF: I have a question also. 16 17 MS. HART: Sure. JUDGE WOODRUFF: You mentioned that 18 there were safety concerns for not having 19 20 requirement that the technician knock on the door. 21 Have there been problems in the past?

Fax: 314.644.1334

MS. HART: We have had problems.

We've had people who have threatened our person,

because we knock on the door before we go back to

do the disconnection, and so we've had dogs, you

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- 1 know, they've let the dogs out of the house on our
- 2 people. And so we've had to go back sometimes and
- 3 do pole cuts for that reason, but yeah, sometimes
- 4 it is --
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: Pole cuts meaning
- 6 you cut it at the pole rather than at the meter?
- 7 MS. HART: That's correct. I'm
- 8 sorry. That was jargon. Yes, we would have to cut
- 9 it at the pole instead of actually going to the
- 10 meter. So sometimes I -- you know, it's nice to be
- 11 able to give someone a little bit of heads up what
- 12 we're doing, although we've already given them
- 13 their notices, and during Cold Weather Rule we've
- 14 made their call. Of course, we're not going to
- 15 disconnect if it's too cold anyway. But sometimes
- 16 it's bad for our field personnel.
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: Is there a danger
- 18 also in not knocking in that suddenly somebody
- 19 finds somebody, a stranger in their backyard and
- 20 may not know why they're there and come out with a
- 21 shotgun, that kind of scenario?
- 22 MS. HART: I can't think of any. I'm
- 23 not saying it probably hasn't happened over the
- 24 years, but generally it's the other way around.
- 25 It's that we're alerting them, and they pretty well

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- 1 know which day we're coming anyway. But yeah, I
- 2 can't think of any off the top of my head that's
- 3 happened recently like that.
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: Okay. Thank you
- 5 very much.
- MS. HART: You're welcome.
- 7 JUDGE WOODRUFF: Is there anyone else
- 8 here wishing to comment on behalf of a utility?
- 9 Come forward, sir.
- 10 MR. LUFT: May it please the
- 11 Commission? I'm Tim Luft for Missouri American
- 12 Water.
- I would echo the comments made by
- 14 Mr. Zucker, Mr. Mitten, Mr. Fischer, Ms. Giboney,
- and I prepared just a short two-and-a half-page
- 16 reply to some of the comments filed earlier this
- 17 week. Rather than read it, I brought over 20
- 18 copies. I'll distribute it.
- 19 I would just touch real roughly on a
- 20 few things. The medical excuse safeguards, I would
- 21 echo the comments that I believe Mr. Mitten made.
- 22 We don't see an issue with it. I asked our folks
- 23 how many of these we see a day. I heard four or
- 24 five. We heard maybe more than that. Every day we
- 25 get these, but we're unaware of an issue or problem

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- 1 with the process that's currently in place.
- 2 I've read the changes and they were,
- 3 frankly, a little more confusing. I think whenever
- 4 they get confusing for me, I'm sure they're
- 5 confusing for the consumers and I just -- I don't
- 6 know that the changes are warranted. I think a
- 7 closer look would need to be taken at that before
- 8 we impose something like that.
- 9 With regard to the door knocking
- 10 rule, Missouri utilities filed some suggested
- 11 language. We are not in agreement with that. We
- 12 think the door knocking rule should be left as is.
- 13 It does have an exception for instances where the
- 14 utility worker believes or fears for their safety,
- 15 that they would not have to go up and knock on the
- 16 door, and we think that's worthwhile.
- I think in the last year we've had
- 18 one assault on one of our workers. So it happens.
- 19 You can imagine, it's a very tense situation.
- There was also a comment I believe by
- 21 consumer groups about shutoff of water for
- 22 nonpayment of sewer. They do not want to see that
- 23 change in these -- in Rule 13. That's provided by
- 24 statute, so I don't know that we can change that.
- 25 But we do shut off of water for nonpayment of sewer

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- 1 for many municipalities in which they provide the
- 2 sewer and we provide the water. The alternatives
- 3 would be they would have to file liens against the
- 4 property or they could actually dig up the yard and
- 5 shut off the sewer, which would make the home
- 6 uninhabitable. That's just a drastic and expensive
- 7 remedy. Shutting off the water seems to work best.
- 8 The credit scoring, we don't do
- 9 credit. If you're a brand-new customer and you've
- 10 never been a customer of ours, you have a clean
- 11 slate with us. So that hasn't been an issue for
- 12 us. We don't take deposits. If that changed in
- 13 the future, I don't know that maybe using that
- 14 third-party number might work well, but that
- 15 doesn't really apply to us. Obviously the Cold
- 16 Weather Rule doesn't apply to us as well, so we
- 17 have no comment on that as well.
- I brought Tom Deters. He was here in
- 19 '93 and testified I believe the last time there was
- 20 changes to Rule 13, and then also Chelsea Harmon,
- 21 who's also someone who lives and breathes with
- 22 these rules every day. I'll take any questions.
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: Let's go ahead -- do
- 24 you have a copy of the documents there?
- MR. LUFT: Yes.

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|----|---|
| 1 | JUDGE WOODRUFF: We'll mark it as |
| 2 | Exhibit 2. |
| 3 | (MAWC EXHIBIT NO. 2 WAS MARKED FOR |
| 4 | IDENTIFICATION BY THE REPORTER.) |
| 5 | JUDGE WOODRUFF: Exhibit 2 will be |
| 6 | received into the record. If I didn't say it |
| 7 | before, Exhibit 1 is also received into the record. |
| 8 | (EXHIBIT NOS. 1 AND 2 WERE RECEIVED |
| 9 | INTO EVIDENCE.) |
| 10 | JUDGE WOODRUFF: Any questions? |
| 11 | CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Mr. Luft, thank you |
| 12 | very much. I'm assuming by your comment that |
| 13 | Missouri American doesn't take deposits and |
| 14 | therefore doesn't use credit scoring, do you have |
| 15 | an opinion or do you have any thought about the |
| 16 | question that I was asking of the others about the |
| 17 | advisability of some uniformity in terms of making |
| 18 | sure that the credit scoring that's used is |
| 19 | measuring the appropriate risk? |
| 20 | MR. LUFT: Since we don't take |
| 21 | deposit, we don't do that, we have no comment on |
| 22 | that. |
| 23 | CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Fair enough. |
| 24 | MR. LUFT: If one day in the future |
| 25 | we might, I think a third-party credit agency |

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- 1 scoring would be helpful. If it focused on
- 2 utilities, certainly that would be better, I would
- 3 think.
- 4 Right now we -- our focus is -- the
- 5 only way you're denied service is if you had a
- 6 prior account with us at say a prior location and
- 7 you hadn't paid your bill and you still haven't
- 8 paid it, until you pay that bill we can't start a
- 9 new service with you. Can't get any more specific
- 10 than that.
- 11 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Let me ask another
- 12 question. Your statement regarding the
- 13 continuation of the door knocking requirement seems
- 14 to depart from your colleagues. Why do you take
- 15 the position that it should be maintained as is?
- 16 MR. LUFT: Well, the comment that the
- 17 Missouri utilities provided was you knock or, if
- 18 you fear for your safety, you could also make a
- 19 phone call that morning, and that would be in lieu
- 20 of it. It's not required, but it's just an option.
- 21 We were concerned that that would be
- 22 considered a requirement over time, and then let's
- 23 say if somebody's doing 200 water shutoffs on a
- 24 day, because they try to do them all at one time, a
- 25 certain time of the month, to make that worker call

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- 1 200 people we don't think is advisable, workable.
- 2 People -- they know we're going to be there. This
- 3 is not a surprise. In certain circumstances it may
- 4 only antagonize them, and/or they see a call from
- 5 Missouri American Water, they're not going to
- 6 answer it.
- 7 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Thank you for your
- 8 time.
- 9 JUDGE WOODRUFF: Commissioner Kenney?
- 10 COMMISSIONER W. KENNEY: No.
- 11 JUDGE WOODRUFF: Commissioner Hall?
- 12 COMMISSIONER HALL? No.
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: Thank you. Anyone
- 14 else here wishing to offer comments on behalf of a
- 15 utility? All right. Well, before we switch gears
- 16 over to the consumer side, we'll take a ten-minute
- 17 break, and we'll come back at 10 minutes to 12.
- 18 (A BREAK WAS TAKEN.)
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: Before the break we
- 20 finished with the consumer side of this, so we're
- 21 going to switch over to the consumer side. We
- 22 finished the utility side. We're going to switch
- 23 to the consumer side. Is there a preference as to
- 24 who goes first? Mr. Poston for Public Counsel.
- MR. POSTON: My name is Marc Poston,

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- 1 and I'm here on behalf of the Office of the Public
- 2 Counsel and public utility consumers. We filed
- 3 comments on Monday, and hopefully you've had an
- 4 opportunity to read those. I'm not going to
- 5 reraise every issue that we raised in our comments,
- 6 but I would like to highlight a few of the more
- 7 important issues.
- 8 The first issue I'd like to address
- 9 is the proposal to expand the use of estimated
- 10 billing in Rule 13.020. The purpose of this rule
- 11 is to require utility bills to be based on actual
- 12 usage whenever possible, and this purpose has
- 13 withstood two previous revisions in 1977 and 1993.
- 14 This rule is good for utility
- 15 companies because it recognizes that there are
- 16 circumstances beyond their control, like blocked
- 17 access to a meter, where the utility simply cannot
- 18 get an actual reading and must have an alternative
- 19 method to bill for the services that they provide.
- 20 But restricting the use of estimated
- 21 billing is good for customers because estimated
- 22 bills run the risk of being inaccurate, which can
- 23 lead to overcharges or undercharges. And this can
- 24 create serious hardships for customers living on a
- 25 tight monthly budget because it can cause a large

Page 79 unexpected bill increase. 1 2 The utility companies say that 3 allowing them to estimate when their equipment fails will recognize the modernization of their 4 5 system, but shouldn't modernized systems provide benefits for customers, especially when customers 6 7 are already paying through rates the cost of that modernized equipment? 8 9 Where is the benefit in adding one more reason for the utility to estimate a bill 10 11 instead of getting an actual read of the meter? It 12 will only lead to more estimation and more 13 inaccurate bills. This is not the type of benefit modernized systems should bring to Missouri. 14 15 When a meter fails, the utility should get to that meter as soon as possible and 16 17 fix it. Utilities should not be allowed to estimate usage for up to three months. If you were 18 to go home today for lunch and you noticed that 19 20 your gas meter had stopped registering usage and 21 you reported it to your gas company, how long would you expect the utility to come fix the problem? 22 Today? Tomorrow? How about January? That's what 23 24 you would be allowing if you make this change. Estimated billing is allowed for three months. 25

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- 1 This makes sense if we're talking
- 2 about blocked access to a meter. It makes no sense
- 3 when we're talking about a faulty meter or faulty
- 4 AMR.
- 5 There's nothing consumer friendly
- 6 about expanding estimated billing. It only makes
- 7 life easier for the company while passing the
- 8 burden of inaccurate meter reads on to the
- 9 customer. Consumers are best protected by a
- 10 practice where if a meter is faulty, the company
- 11 will send an employee as soon as possible to fix
- 12 the problem and read the meter.
- 13 The next issue I'd like to address is
- 14 the proposal to eliminate the requirement that
- 15 customers be allowed to read the meters themselves
- 16 and report usage. This is a good tool for both the
- 17 company and the customer because it allows the
- 18 company to avoid estimates if for whatever reason
- 19 the utility is unable or unwilling to read the
- 20 meter to obtain an actual read.
- 21 The utility proposal to allow only
- 22 self reads when the utility and customer both agree
- 23 is essentially the same as taking that protection
- 24 away from the customers. Self read cards allow
- 25 consumers to protect themselves against large

Page 81 catchup bills caused by meter failure that is not 2 the fault of the customer. We ask that you keep 3 this important consumer protection in place. JUDGE WOODRUFF: Mr. Poston, can I 4 5 ask --6 MR. POSTON: Yes. 7 JUDGE WOODRUFF: -- a clarifying 8 question here about the reading cards? Are you suggesting that a customer should be able to ask for a self read card at any time or only --10 MR. POSTON: No. 11 12 JUDGE WOODRUFF: Please explain. MR. POSTON: Just if for some reason 13 let's say the AMR fails on a meter, and that would 14 15 give the customer the option of going and looking at the meter itself and making that read and 16 17 sending it in. 18 JUDGE WOODRUFF: Okay. Thank you. 19 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Is that what the rule currently provides? I mean, in that case the 20 21 customer has that ability to do that, right? MR. POSTON: Well, I don't think it 22 specifies AMR. I don't think any of the rules ever 23 gotten to that level of technology being addressed 24 25 in this rule.

Page 82 1 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: But in the event of 2 a meter failure generally? 3 MR. POSTON: Well, a meter failure, them reading the meter may not help. I'd have to 4 5 pull them back up and relook at them to see 6 whether I would say that it applies to AMRs as it's 7 written now. CHAIRMAN KENNEY: But it's not an 8 9 unlimited ability for consumers to use self reports? 10 MR. POSTON: No, I don't believe so. 11 12 The next issue I'd like to comment on is the 13 utility company proposal to eliminate the requirement that utility personnel attempt to 14 contact the resident at the home before shutting 15 off service to that resident's home. 16 17 And one of the reasons stated by the companies for why this change should be made is 18 that in the future utility companies may be able to 19 remotely disconnect service. But the impact of 20 21 that technology should not be considered in the rulemaking until that technology is actually 22 implemented or once it's known when that technology 23 would be available, if it's implemented at all. 24 25 For gas companies, such technology is

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- 1 far away from being implemented here in Missouri.
- 2 For starters, I don't know how the cost of such a
- 3 system can be justified since new equipment for
- 4 that purpose would need to be placed on every
- 5 meter, but only a small minority of customers would
- 6 ever need to be remotely disconnected in a given
- 7 year. So I really don't see that technology
- 8 hitting Missouri any time soon.
- 9 The focus here should be on safety.
- 10 A door knock is also a safety knock because it
- 11 increases the chances that the customer will become
- 12 aware of the disconnection and be able to remedy it
- 13 as soon as possible. Maybe their disconnect notice
- 14 was lost in the mail. Maybe the customer is
- 15 elderly with medical conditions that have
- 16 unfortunately caused the customer to overlook their
- 17 bill. We ask that you keep the safety knock in
- 18 place.
- 19 JUDGE WOODRUFF: Again, clarifying
- 20 question about the safety knocks. Is there any
- 21 requirement that anybody answer the door before
- 22 they disconnect?
- MR. POSTON: I don't believe so.
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: So they can just
- 25 knock, and if nobody's home, they go out and

Page 84 disconnect? 1 2 MR. POSTON: Right. I think it's 3 just an attempt to contact at the door. And the last issue I'll address is 4 5 credit scoring. We urge the Commission to maintain 6 the provision in the rule that allows the customer 7 to avoid a deposit if they're able to show that they own a home, are employed, have an adequate 8 source of income or can provide adequate credit resources. We also ask that you not make the 10 changes proposed by the utility companies. 11 12 Currently credit scoring is allowed 13 on an experimental basis through tariffs of MGE and Laclede Gas Company. I can't speak for the other 14 15 utility company tariffs. MGE's experimental credit scoring has only been in place for two years 16 17 exactly as of last Saturday, and I believe these 18 were labeled experimental because the impact was 19 not known. 20 Allowing credit scoring as an 21 experiment suggests that at some point the experiment would be analyzed to determine whether 22 the experimental designation can be lifted, though 23 24 we've seen no analysis of the experimental credit scoring that has been in place for these companies. 25

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| 1 | Before you change these rules to |
|----|---|
| 2 | essentially open the door for more credit scoring, |
| 3 | we ask that you first require a study to be done of |
| 4 | current credit scoring practices to look at things |
| 5 | like the number of consumers impacted, whether |
| 6 | those impacts were positive or negative, and |
| 7 | whether credit scoring has created an unreasonable |
| 8 | burden on customers or applicants. |
| 9 | In MGE's case, MGE agreed to a number |
| 10 | of conditions aimed at protecting consumers, and a |
| 11 | number of these conditions were recommended by the |
| 12 | National Association of State Utility Consumer |
| 13 | Advocates through a resolution. And these |
| 14 | conditions include allowing applicants to avoid |
| 15 | paying a deposit if they designate a third-party |
| 16 | guarantor. They require disclosure to the customer |
| 17 | of the credit score results, and disclosure is |
| 18 | required by the Equal Credit Opportunity Act and |
| 19 | the Fair Credit Reporting Act. |
| 20 | These conditions also require MGE to |
| 21 | inform the customer that they can get their deposit |
| 22 | back if they're able to increase their credit score |
| 23 | or improve their credit score. |

So rejecting the company's proposed

changes here will not prohibit companies from doing

24

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- 1 credit scoring. It will just require them to get
- 2 permission from this Commission through a tariff
- 3 change, which is the practice the Commission is
- 4 using currently, and it should work in the future.
- 5 I'll conclude by asking that when you
- 6 deliberate on what changes to make, please stay
- 7 focused on protecting the public since that's the
- 8 primary purpose of these rules, and it's also a
- 9 primary purpose of this Commission as the courts
- 10 have held. Thank you.
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: Mr. Chairman?
- 12 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Mr. Poston, thank
- 13 you. Do you have any thoughts about if we were to
- 14 allow credit scoring -- let me back up.
- Do you accept the notion that credit
- 16 scoring is a better and more subjective and less
- 17 objective measure of risk?
- 18 MR. POSTON: I would suggest that we
- 19 study this a little more in depth before I would be
- 20 able to answer that question. I think we've had
- 21 Laclede doing it for a number of years, MGE for two
- 22 years. I think we can try to analyze this issue
- 23 using their data and any other data we can get and
- 24 answer those questions at that time.
- 25 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: And then you

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- 1 probably have the same answer to my next question
- 2 then. If we were to allow credit scoring, would it
- 3 be sufficient enough consumer protection to insure
- 4 that the risk being measured is specifically a risk
- 5 associated with non-utility payment and allowed or
- 6 required some measure of uniformity in that regard?
- 7 Would that be a sufficient enough consumer
- 8 protection?
- 9 MR. POSTON: I don't know if it would
- 10 be sufficient enough. It seemed like it would be a
- 11 more focused and more accurate measure. But again,
- 12 that's assuming -- I'm drawing a lot of assumptions
- 13 that I don't know about how they put data together
- 14 and how it's analyzed and that kind of thing.
- 15 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Thank you.
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: Commissioner Hall?
- 17 COMMISSIONER HALL: No questions.
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: Thank you.
- 19 Mr. Coffman, did you want to go next?
- MR. COFFMAN: Be happy to. Thanks.
- 21 May it please the Commission, Chairman Kenney,
- 22 Commissioner Hall, Judge Woodruff?
- 23 I am representing today two clients,
- 24 AARP and the Consumers Council of Missouri. My
- 25 clients are in agreement as to changes that they

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- 1 would like to see and the ones that they support.
- 2 You have our written comments, and I won't mention
- 3 all of the things in there. I know this is a
- 4 difficult endeavor because there's so many separate
- 5 issues here, and so I would like to give some
- 6 comments now in the order of priority that my
- 7 clients care about these issues.
- 8 We wish that you would -- we don't
- 9 want to win on three or four minor issues and lose
- 10 on the ones that we really care about. So we
- 11 provided our comments in chronological order, and I
- 12 want to give some comments here in a minute in sort
- 13 of order of what we think is of utmost importance
- 14 to the safety of consumers.
- I want to thank Gay Fred and the
- 16 Staff for this many-year odyssey that we've been
- on. We've gotten to discuss these issues at
- 18 length, and I'm fairly confident that we wouldn't
- 19 be able to resolve all the issues. We resolved a
- 20 lot of them. There would be even more if we hadn't
- 21 gone through that multiyear process. But there are
- 22 some just very difficult policy issues where the
- 23 Commission's going to be forced to make a decision.
- 24 From our perspective, we believe that
- 25 the proposed rule, unfortunately, in some key areas

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- 1 tips the balance too far towards the utility and
- 2 against a consumer who might have a complaint with
- 3 the utility, and we would urge you to retain the
- 4 same balance that you currently have. Certainly
- 5 update the rules for technology, modernization,
- 6 this is a good goal, but as we're doing it, make
- 7 sure as we're transferring to a more electronic or
- 8 sophisticated world we don't inadvertently delete
- 9 rights or protections that are currently in place.
- 10 First I'll say that my clients
- 11 support generally all of the comments of the Office
- 12 of Public Counsel. The number one issue I want to
- 13 talk about is the door knock or safety check that
- 14 has been in place by technological necessity for
- 15 decades, if not maybe a hundred years, the idea
- 16 that you simply check on someone before you go and
- 17 disconnect a service that might be an essential
- 18 service.
- 19 We have several stories and have
- 20 heard plenty of anecdotes at least where someone
- 21 has been in a vulnerable or bad situation and the
- 22 situation's been corrected because an employee did
- 23 knock on the door. There are a variety of reasons
- 24 for this. Someone might be older. They might be
- 25 confused or unable to fully understand a written

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- 1 bill. The immediacy of having someone come to the
- 2 door sometimes brings it -- brings the situation
- 3 into focus. Sometimes there are safety hazards in
- 4 the house.
- 5 And I think the one thing that I
- 6 would like you to take away from the letter from
- 7 Dr. Megan Sandel who studied these issues
- 8 extensively, that in her study they have found that
- 9 approximately 25 percent of low income homes have
- 10 electrically powered medical devices, and that's a
- 11 situation where it's often encountered when someone
- 12 comes to the door. I'm on a device that if you
- 13 shut off the electricity, they're going to be in a
- 14 medically dangerous situation. I think that
- 15 there's some people here who might be able to tell
- 16 some stories.
- 17 This is an important issue to us.
- 18 Certainly we should allow for electronic transfer,
- 19 electronic payment, electronic notice if the
- 20 customer wants it, but we need to make sure that
- 21 we're not completely removing the last vestige of
- 22 human contact that the utility has some
- 23 responsibility to attempt to make before an
- 24 essential service is disconnected.
- We had -- this issue has come up in

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- 1 Illinois because the rule is not as explicit as
- 2 yours. We urge you to keep the rule as it is.
- 3 We're opposed to the various changes that the
- 4 utilities have proposed to allow phone calls or
- 5 other alternative methods. The problem in Illinois
- 6 is that their rule merely states the utility should
- 7 announce itself. So we have a situation there
- 8 where Ameren Illinois still does a very good job,
- 9 and I want to commend them for going and making
- 10 sure that they attempt to contact the person,
- 11 whoever might be in the house.
- 12 But Commonwealth Edison we have a lot
- 13 of dispute with. They have interpreted the rule
- 14 simply to shout from the yard, ComEd here,
- 15 disconnect your bill without making that attempt to
- 16 make a personal notice.
- 17 Second issue in, I guess, order of
- 18 priority from my client's perspective would be the
- 19 credit checking criteria for making a deposit.
- 20 When these rules were last adopted, there was a
- 21 compromise made regarding credit scoring, and that
- 22 is credit scoring is allowed as a means to
- 23 establish credit, but there's also these basic what
- 24 we call prima facie methods, either owning a home
- 25 or having a regular source of income, the four

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- 1 methods that we've been discussing.
- 2 It's my opinion that those methods
- 3 are more logical and more objective than deferring
- 4 the decision to a third unregulated party to make
- 5 the decision about credit scoring. Certainly
- 6 credit scoring has become more sophisticated.
- 7 There's algorithms and all kinds of data analysis
- 8 that is now possible, but we -- and we think that
- 9 the utility should have that tool available to
- 10 them, but we would urge the Commission to retain
- 11 for all consumers the current additional means as
- 12 sort of a safety net.
- 13 We would oppose exclusively going to
- 14 credit scoring to entities the Commission does not
- 15 regulate. There might be some very good ones out
- 16 there, but without some, you know, further
- 17 refinement or criteria about how those companies
- 18 should do their checking, we think that there
- 19 should still be these four other means of
- 20 establishing credit.
- 21 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Mr. Coffman, so you
- 22 would be okay with that being an option available?
- 23 MR. COFFMAN: As long as these other
- 24 methods were also a method to establish credit,
- 25 then that relieves our concern. Now, as the rule

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- 1 has been proposed, as it was proposed through the
- 2 Secretary of State, Missouri Register, the four
- 3 prima facie methods are now only available to those
- 4 who have no credit history. And there are some
- 5 folks in that situation, say widows or individuals
- 6 just have never personally had that opportunity to
- 7 establish a credit history although they may own
- 8 their home. And so that's helpful to them, but we
- 9 think that those four prima facie methods of
- 10 establishing credit should still be available to
- 11 all consumers as sort of a backstop safety net for
- 12 establishing credit.
- We do know that even despite the
- 14 greater sophistication of credit scoring, we know
- 15 that credit reports still are full of errors, and
- 16 we just think it's against public policy to be
- 17 completely deferring that rule to an unregulated
- 18 entity.
- 19 Estimated bills, it's a -- we
- 20 probably discussed this more than any other issue
- 21 in your collaboratives. It just gets awfully
- 22 complicated. You know, the proposal that utilities
- 23 not disconnect until they actually go out and read
- 24 it was a consumer party proposal to kind of cut
- 25 through. The rule, the proposed rule gets so

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- 1 complicated that we thought, well, that's fine if
- 2 you want to have all these alternative ways of
- 3 doing it provided that we know that ultimately
- 4 you're not going to disconnect until you go out and
- 5 check it. You're going to be going out to
- 6 disconnect anyway. So it seemed like a way to
- 7 resolve it, although, as I understand it, the
- 8 utilities are very opposed to that.
- 9 I think this issue should be put in
- 10 perspective. Since the last time the rules were
- 11 amended, I think the incidence of problems that
- 12 lead to estimated bills have been largely --
- 13 they've largely gone away, maybe as much as
- 14 90 percent of the problems we used to have with the
- 15 meters being inside the home and having to schedule
- 16 it. AMR meters have taken care of that problem.
- 17 So I don't know that it's as big a problem as it
- 18 used to be.
- 19 I think this would be maybe the most
- 20 important issue that I would ask you to consider,
- 21 and that is what happens in the instance of a
- 22 mechanical failure. I think you can see through
- 23 the proposed rule and through what the utilities
- 24 would prefer is that when a meter fails and there's
- 25 a mechanical problem with it, that that risk is

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- 1 borne by the consumer.
- 2 From consumers' perspective, they
- 3 think that that is not their concern. If the meter
- 4 breaks, they feel that the utility should be the
- 5 one who bears the risk of fixing it. I think that
- 6 placing the risk of mechanical failure on the
- 7 utility is logical. They're the ones who are
- 8 installing it. They may not be the vendor who
- 9 manufactured the meter, but the utility -- the
- 10 customer certainly has no control over it.
- 11 And so that's -- that's been part of
- 12 the dispute in that neither the utility side nor
- 13 the consumer side feels it's their fault if the
- 14 meter itself fails. I would assert that if there's
- 15 a mechanical problem or failed meter, that it's --
- 16 it should be borne by the utility.
- 17 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: So, Mr. Coffman, by
- 18 moving -- or by extending the amount of time that
- 19 the utility can estimate the bill to three months,
- 20 is it your thought that that removes their
- 21 incentive to fix the meter quickly?
- 22 MR. COFFMAN: I think it reduces
- 23 their incentive, yes.
- 24 I'll say something agreeable with the
- 25 utilities. As far as the medical certification, we

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- 1 would have no opposition to taking that out of the
- 2 rule or tabling that for further discussion. I
- 3 think the way it's currently drafted may be
- 4 something after just extended discussions become so
- 5 complicated or administratively burdensome, we're
- 6 not sure we completely understand it or it would be
- 7 that easy to administer. I think we would probably
- 8 prefer the current way things are operating than to
- 9 take on the medical certification rule as it's
- 10 currently drafted.
- 11 As far as electronic bills and
- 12 electronic payments, I don't know if we're too far
- 13 apart on that. Certainly I think it's a good idea
- 14 to include electronic transfer as a way that bills
- 15 can be sent and a way that bills can be paid if the
- 16 utility -- or if the customer agrees to it.
- 17 I'm not sure -- I wouldn't disagree
- 18 that if a utility is not receiving a good check,
- 19 that they should continue -- consumers should
- 20 continue to insist on that. Our main concern is
- 21 that in the future we don't want to see a world
- 22 where electronic payment is insisted upon.
- 23 In other words, we don't -- we hope
- that current paper methods of payment and other
- 25 current methods are preserved and that consumers

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- 1 aren't forced to either accept a bill by electronic
- 2 means or payment by electronic means. That would
- 3 be --
- 4 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: But you're not in
- 5 favor of requiring the utility to continue
- 6 accepting checks from people who have bounced
- 7 several checks?
- 8 MR. COFFMAN: No. No. I'm not sure
- 9 how we draft that, but our hope is that you -- I'm
- 10 not sure that I would want the rule to then mandate
- 11 that payment then come through electronic means.
- 12 I'd have to look at that. That may be something
- 13 that could possibly be negotiated. I'm not sure
- 14 we're completely at odds on that issue. We would
- 15 like customer agreement or customer choice to be a
- 16 part of the rule.
- 17 We think that there's a problem with
- 18 the proposal in the definition of adding the
- 19 inquiry. I'm not sure if that has been clearly set
- 20 out. We just -- we think that as it's written it
- 21 may obscure the record of concerns that customers
- 22 actually have. Often a consumer has a payment on
- 23 his or her bill that they don't agree with and they
- think that there's a problem with it and they might
- 25 call the hotline, the consumer services number and

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- 1 say, I'm just calling to ask what this charge is,
- 2 you know, just be polite and not start right off
- 3 with saying, take this off my bill.
- 4 And it is a problem if you're trying
- 5 to create some dichotomy between an inquiry and a
- 6 complaint, because they often begin as an inquiry,
- 7 and maybe they'll just be logged in as an inquiry
- 8 and not as a dispute but it might evolve into one.
- 9 I'm not sure how to do that.
- 10 Often we request records from the
- 11 utilities about complaints in certain categories,
- 12 and if we get back a response to our data request
- 13 that there's -- well, we haven't had any complaints
- 14 about this particular charge, but they might have
- 15 had 100 people call them asking them what the heck
- 16 is this charge doing on my bill. So I'm just not
- 17 sure if this distinction between inquiry and
- 18 complaint is helpful to the Commission.
- 19 The disconnection time I think is an
- 20 important issue. You know, extending hours to when
- 21 someone is available there to maybe instantly
- 22 remedy a disconnection might be positive, but our
- 23 objection to extending the hours to 7 a.m. to
- 7 p.m. are not just that the utility might not be
- 25 available. The current rule says that that's only

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- 1 allowable if there's someone at the utility who
- 2 would then be able to within an hour reconnect
- 3 service.
- 4 But often with low income customers,
- 5 the need is to be able to find a social service
- 6 agency, a community action agency or charity that
- 7 can help you get your service reestablished and get
- 8 them on a payment plan. If there isn't a social
- 9 service agency that's open after five o'clock, that
- 10 might frustrate the ability of getting connection
- 11 the next day and the family might be without power
- 12 overnight.
- 13 And I think some of the folks who
- 14 deal with these issues on the front lines might be
- 15 able to tell you some stories about the workability
- 16 of that problem.
- 17 This next comment comes up in a
- 18 couple different contexts in here, and this is
- 19 the -- this is kind of a question of process for
- 20 the Commission, whether it is better to have a
- 21 requirement in a rule or in a tariff. Our
- 22 preference is that, when you can, that basic
- 23 rights -- and this is all about the most basic
- 24 rights that a consumer has against a utility or
- vis-a-vis a utility, that they be in a rule.

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- 1 And as we are updating our rules in
- 2 the electronic age, the rules are posted on the
- 3 Commission's website. They're fairly easy to
- 4 Google and find, and consumers who want to know
- 5 what their rights and responsibilities are can, I
- 6 think, readily find it. Just a minimally educated
- 7 person can probably look up the rules and find out
- 8 what it is that they can and cannot insist upon.
- 9 But a tariff is a little harder. To
- 10 be able to find what the rules are between that
- 11 customer -- me and my utility, finding the tariff
- 12 is sometimes hard for me. I'm a utility lawyer.
- 13 So we would say for the -- for the goal of
- 14 providing access to the rules and making the public
- 15 able to find the rules, put minimum requirements in
- 16 the rules where you can.
- 17 I understand the need to be somewhat
- 18 flexible between utilities, but we would prefer
- 19 that if there are differences in what you demand or
- 20 expect from utilities, that those be adopted
- 21 through the process of a waiver, have a case -- a
- 22 docket established and there's actually a case that
- 23 sets that out as opposed to even a tariff. Tariffs
- 24 are a little bit arcane for most people to
- 25 understand and find.

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- 1 We believe strongly that denial of
- 2 service should be documented in writing. We are
- 3 opposed to allowing mere verbal denials because
- 4 there is sometimes a question about whether the
- 5 notice was accurate. I know that the rule says,
- 6 well, the utility would have to record it and
- 7 retain it. That's just not as easy to see as a
- 8 letter.
- 9 And often even if the consumer is
- 10 told, well, if you disagree with the fact that
- 11 we're denying you service, you can establish a
- 12 complaint at the Commission and so forth and call
- 13 them at their hotline, it isn't as -- it isn't as
- 14 good a protective notice than having that in
- 15 writing. Here's the phone number you can call.
- 16 And our concern is that the denial --
- in a denial of service situation, that the
- 18 consumers have the same rights and same notices and
- 19 so forth as with disconnection of service, and we
- 20 think that that's the law in Missouri, that, for
- 21 instance, you can't be disconnected for service
- 22 that you didn't benefit from, the benefit of
- 23 service rule.
- 24 And there is some concern that
- 25 customers are -- or applicants or potential

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- 1 customers are denied service based on someone
- 2 else's bill, and we want to make sure that they
- 3 have the same access to the complaint system and
- 4 that they have the same notice. That's why we
- 5 favor generally having written rules as opposed
- 6 to -- written denials as opposed to verbal denials.
- 7 We want to make sure they know their rights.
- I think that's the primary category
- 9 of issues that we would like you to consider. I
- 10 won't go into too much more detail, although I
- 11 think that there are some people here who might
- 12 understand these issues from the front line
- 13 perspective better who I urge you to listen to.
- 14 Any questions?
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: Mr. Chairman?
- 16 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Mr. Coffman,
- 17 thanks.
- MR. COFFMAN: Thank you.
- 19 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Could you expand a
- 20 little bit on -- or just explain a little bit more
- 21 from the consumer perspective with respect to the
- 22 change in the definition of consumer to applicant
- 23 and what the specific concern is there?
- MR. COFFMAN: I think that issue also
- 25 goes to the same concern we have about denial of

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- 1 service versus disconnection of service. We want
- 2 to -- we want to make sure that an applicant is not
- 3 denied rights under the rule that a consumer has.
- We think that denial of service --
- 5 you should have the same rights when you're denied
- 6 service as when you're -- the utility's trying to
- 7 disconnect your service. And our concern is that
- 8 if the use of applicant refers to someone who is
- 9 denied service, that some of the other provisions
- in the rule that now apply to consumer would be
- 11 argued as inapplicable to that person whose service
- 12 was denied.
- 13 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: So it's not so much
- 14 a concern with change in the definition, it's
- 15 concern that by changing the definition you're
- 16 somehow removing protections that an applicant
- 17 would have?
- 18 MR. COFFMAN: And it may be
- 19 inadvertent, yeah.
- 20 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Okay. Thank you.
- 21 I don't have any other questions.
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: Commissioner Kenney?
- 23 COMMISSIONER W. KENNEY: No, sir.
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: Commissioner Hall?
- 25 COMMISSIONER HALL: No.

Page 104 1 JUDGE WOODRUFF: Thank you, 2 Mr. Coffman. 3 MR. COFFMAN: Thank you. JUDGE WOODRUFF: Is there anyone else 4 5 here who wishes to testify on the consumer side of things? Good afternoon. 6 7 MS. HUTCHINSON: Good afternoon. I 8 am Jackie Hutchinson, and I am vice president of operations for People's Community Action Agency in St. Louis. People's Community Action Agency serves 10 11 the city of St. Louis and the city of Wellston. 12 So my career spans about 30 years in 13 doing this work, and I have participated in every Cold Weather Rule proceeding that there's been, 14 15 including the initial one. I have been working with the workgroup for the past three years. 16 17 wasn't invited to the party early, so I haven't been doing this for seven years. But I want to 18 19 thank the Public Service Commission for having the 20 workgroup and for us being able to come to 21 consensus on some of the issues. I don't want to go back through all 22 23 of the testimony that I've submitted, and I want to 24 concur with what's been said before me by the Office of the Public Counsel and by John Coffman. 25

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- 1 So I want to talk about the things that I think are
- 2 most important and just respond to a couple of the
- 3 comments that have been made by the utilities.
- 4 I think the most important issue to
- 5 me is to make sure that consumers do not lose any
- 6 of their protections that exist now and that the
- 7 health and safety of consumers is not eroded as we
- 8 move forward with this rule.
- 9 And so, for instance, the knock on
- 10 the door, which we see as a basic health and safety
- 11 check where you're making sure that there's not an
- 12 elderly person or a disabled person, and we see
- 13 this as an issue that is going to increase as our
- 14 population ages. So people are living longer.
- The age 85 and older group is the
- 16 largest growing population in the state of
- 17 Missouri, and many of those elderly are very
- 18 isolated. Many of them we don't know of as a
- 19 social service agency. We don't know that they are
- 20 out there and isolated and in threat of
- 21 disconnection. And indeed those cases are brought
- 22 to us, our attention by the utility company, by
- 23 other consumers.
- I fully agree with Mr. Zucker that,
- 25 you know, utility workers are a poor substitute for

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- 1 social workers, but they do aid us in being able to
- 2 respond to those kind of cases. And, you know, I
- 3 gave an example in my case. There have been many
- 4 other examples and -- where utility company workers
- 5 notified us that there was an at-risk person in a
- 6 household. So we don't want to see that protection
- 7 eroded.
- In the case of credit checks, so part
- 9 of the work that we do as a community action agency
- 10 is that we work with individuals who have bad
- 11 credit or have had their credit scores eroded and
- 12 we work with them to try to build their credit back
- 13 up.
- But one of the things we've seen is
- 15 that the credit rate can drop very drastically for
- 16 a person that is experiencing something like
- 17 unemployment or a divorce or a medical issue where
- 18 their income has reduced, and they're making
- 19 choices. People are making choices. We're going
- 20 to pay our housing costs, but we can't afford to
- 21 pay the credit card bills.
- 22 So the credit score is often -- if
- 23 it's low, it's often not a reflection of the
- 24 priorities that families have to make when their
- 25 income has reduced. It's a reflection of the

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- 1 bigger picture.
- 2 The fact that utility companies do
- 3 not report to the credit bureaus means that, you
- 4 know, even if they're doing some kind of indexing,
- 5 it's not taking into consideration their past
- 6 history of credit, of paying their utilities on
- 7 time. So we can have a person that paid their
- 8 utilities on time for many years. They, you know,
- 9 had to move from one state to the other because
- 10 they lost their job, say, for instance, and they
- 11 get to Missouri and their credit score is low, but
- 12 it has nothing to do with whether or not they paid
- 13 their utility bills at all.
- 14 And it could result in a hardship for
- 15 that family because they would be assessed a high
- 16 deposit based on the credit score which does not
- 17 reflect how they normally pay their utilities and
- 18 other housing costs.
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: Ms. Hutchinson, how
- 20 large are these deposits generally?
- 21 MS. HUTCHINSON: I'm not really sure
- 22 how high they are, but I would say average 3 to
- 23 \$500. We've had instances where deposits were
- 24 higher than that, but I think that the average --
- 25 because when a person moves into a property, it's

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- 1 often based on what that -- the usage at that
- 2 property and not their actual usage. So it's going
- 3 to vary widely based on what the -- what the
- 4 property is.
- Now, in the city where there's a lot
- of big old houses and, you know, people have the
- 7 worst kinds of housing stock, the deposits are
- 8 often higher. And so if a person is downsizing, we
- 9 see a lot of families that are, you know,
- 10 downsizing in terms of mortgage because they've
- 11 lost a job or whatever, but really what they're
- 12 getting is a house that is a poor housing quality
- 13 and often has higher utility bills. So they
- 14 have -- you know, they have larger deposits than
- 15 they would have had in the -- in a better property.
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: Do you frequently
- 17 see clients come in who could pay the monthly bill
- 18 but can't come up with the money for the deposit?
- MS. HUTCHINSON: Absolutely.
- 20 Absolutely. And it's very prevalent not only with
- 21 low income but with the working poor, people who
- 22 have lost a job or even one person in the household
- lost a job, so now they're trying to live on one
- 24 income.
- The other population is those

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- 1 recently disabled, and so we may have clients who
- 2 have -- and I can think of one in particular who
- 3 was employed, had a very decent job, very middle
- 4 class family, became disabled, and it took quite a
- 5 while for those disability benefits to begin, and
- 6 it took probably almost a year for that family to
- 7 begin getting those disability benefits. In that
- 8 year's time, they lost their house and had to move
- 9 to another -- a rental property and then get
- 10 assessed a huge deposit when they move into that
- 11 property.
- 12 So there are all kinds of reasons
- 13 where if we're going to look -- use credit scoring,
- 14 that we need to be able to look at other factors if
- 15 the credit is below the -- whatever the score is.
- 16 Are there factors? Has that person paid their
- 17 housing costs? Has that person paid their
- 18 utilities in the past? Did they pay them when they
- 19 were employed? You could pretty much get that
- 20 information from your own records.
- 21 You know, we can't just rely on the
- 22 credit scores because they don't tell us the
- 23 picture of what is actually happening in that
- 24 family.
- 25 Let's see. The water service being

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- 1 cut off, and that's -- you know, that's an issue
- 2 that we see may escalate in the future with water
- 3 service being cut off because families cannot pay
- 4 their sewer bill. What I know is that families
- 5 have to prioritize when they have very low income,
- 6 and that often they will pay the water because they
- 7 recognize that that is a true health and safety
- 8 issue not to have the water.
- 9 And the sewer company has other
- 10 remedies. The sewer company can file a lien on the
- 11 house. When the house is sold, they get their
- 12 money. Maybe that's not as timely as they would
- 13 like it, but they do have other remedies.
- 14 And so to -- you know, as we move
- 15 forward with sewer costs increasing and water costs
- 16 increasing, I would hate to see it, you know, such
- 17 that those things can be tied together and the
- 18 health and safety of a family be put at risk even
- 19 if they are doing the best they can by paying the
- 20 water bill, because normally you have to pay all of
- 21 the water bill. So they pay the water bill because
- 22 they know that that's a health and safety risk.
- I would hate to see that continue. I
- 24 know it's already happening in some places, but
- 25 the -- the widespread use of that as a method of

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- 1 collecting for the sewer bill is unacceptable for
- 2 most families that I serve.
- 3
 Let's see. I think the -- I
- 4 disagree -- I agree with all of the other things
- 5 that have been said by the consumer advocates, and
- 6 I just want to make sure that we take into
- 7 consideration as we move forward that consumer
- 8 protections and consumer health and safety is a
- 9 responsibility of all of us as a community.
- 10 Businesses have civic responsibility as well as
- 11 individuals to try to make those protections
- 12 available, and I think that we don't want to see
- 13 any of the protections that exist right now eroded
- 14 as we move forward.
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: Thank you.
- 16 Mr. Chairman?
- 17 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Ms. Hutchinson,
- 18 thank you for your effort and thanks for your
- 19 testimony. I have one question that's unrelated to
- 20 the things you just talked about but something that
- 21 was brought up earlier. Do you have a thought
- 22 about locating pay stations inside payday loan
- 23 places?
- MS. HUTCHINSON: Absolutely I do.
- 25 Sorry I didn't say that. So part of the work that

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- 1 we do as a community action agency is try to
- 2 educate people not to use payday loans, and we
- 3 think that locating pay stations in payday loan
- 4 stores where they charge upward of 700 percent
- 5 interest is unacceptable, and particularly in urban
- 6 areas where there are many other options. There
- 7 are grocery stores who act as pay stations all over
- 8 the place, and it is an unnecessary thing in an
- 9 urban area.
- 10 As far as rural areas are concerned,
- 11 I think more effort should be made to look for
- 12 unlikely partners that would be able to take those.
- 13 If there's not a grocery store, maybe convenience
- 14 store, smaller convenience stores may be
- 15 approached. Maybe a financial institution like a
- 16 bank could do it.
- 17 I think there are other options that
- 18 could be explored, and I think that payday -- we'd
- 19 like to run the payday loan stores out of Missouri,
- 20 and we have efforts on the way to try to do so. So
- 21 I think it would behoove the utility companies to
- 22 start looking for some other place.
- 23 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Thank you. Is the
- 24 concern that when people go to pay a bill, that
- 25 they are also taking out a loan to pay that bill?

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- 1 What's the concern exactly with locating --
- MS. HUTCHINSON: Yes, exactly that.
- 3 When they come in to pay the bill, they are
- 4 encouraged to take out payday loans to pay the
- 5 bills. I can give you many examples of people who
- 6 didn't have the money to pay the bill and the
- 7 payday loan stores encouraged them to take out the
- 8 loan to pay the bill and -- and that got them in a
- 9 cycle of paying it off and then having to take out
- 10 a new loan because they still didn't have enough
- 11 money. And it's a vicious cycle that people get
- 12 themselves into. They don't expect that that's
- 13 what is going to happen.
- And it's not just low income people,
- 15 and actually, it's a misnomer that low-income folks
- 16 are the ones using the payday lenders because they
- 17 often don't have checking accounts and it requires
- 18 a checking account. It's the working, the middle
- 19 class and the working poor that don't have enough
- 20 money to have an emergency savings, and so they --
- 21 they make those loans if an emergency exists and
- 22 get in that cycle.
- 23 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: What about the
- 24 argument that without locating pay centers in
- 25 payday loan places in some communities, there

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- 1 wouldn't -- they would have to drive a long
- 2 distance to be able to pay their bill?
- 3 MS. HUTCHINSON: So I don't know
- 4 where that is that that would happen. I mean, I
- 5 don't -- I can't address that because I can't
- 6 imagine where in the state there's not a Wal-Mart,
- 7 you know. In a lot of places Wal-Mart takes
- 8 utility bills, or a bank or something, some other
- 9 place that would be available to do that. I think
- 10 that the effort has to be made to figure that out,
- 11 but I think it's doable.
- 12 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Thank you.
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: Any other questions?
- 14 COMMISSIONER HALL: Yeah, I have one.
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: Ms. Hutchinson,
- 16 Commissioner Hall has a question.
- MS. HUTCHINSON: Sorry.
- 18 COMMISSIONER HALL: That's quite all
- 19 right. Do you have a position on the mandatory
- 20 preferred billing date issue? Do you have clients
- 21 who would be much more able to pay bills on time if
- 22 they could pick the date that those bills were due?
- MS. HUTCHINSON: Yes. The elderly in
- 24 particular get their check once a month at a
- 25 certain time of the month, and it would be a lot

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- 1 easier if they could have a billing cycle that was
- 2 consistent with when they get their check. Also
- 3 for disabled families, it's much more consistent
- 4 for them to be able to pay around the time that
- 5 they get their checks. So yes, I think that it
- 6 would be better for them.
- 7 COMMISSIONER HALL: Thank you.
- 8 MS. HUTCHINSON: And I think some
- 9 utilities are already making that available, those
- 10 pay dates available.
- 11 JUDGE WOODRUFF: Does budget billing
- 12 help in that regard as well?
- MS. HUTCHINSON: Budget billing helps
- 14 if the client has enough income to pay the budget
- 15 payment every month. And so in many instances
- 16 we -- we try to get families to use budget billing
- 17 all of the time because we think it's the best
- 18 option, but if the income -- if the energy burden
- 19 is way higher than the income, then budget billing
- 20 is not going to work. The affordability programs
- 21 would help in that -- in that manner.
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: Okay. Thank you.
- 23 Good afternoon.
- 24 MS. LINGUM: Good afternoon. My name
- 25 is Jackie Lingum. I am an attorney at Legal

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- 1 Services of Eastern Missouri. Legal Services is a
- 2 civil nonprofit legal services provider to 27 -- 21
- 3 counties, excuse me, in eastern and northeastern
- 4 Missouri.
- 5 I'm here to add to what you have
- 6 heard from the consumer advocates but also what
- 7 Ms. Hutchinson just shared with you. We represent
- 8 low income individuals and also a lot of working
- 9 poor, and increasingly we see individuals who have
- 10 been previously known as members of the middle
- 11 class prior to the recent economic issues.
- So I want to just offer a few
- 13 highlights. We also obviously signed on to the
- 14 comments with Consumers Council, AARP, and also
- 15 agree with the comments made by the Office of
- 16 Public Counsel. But I wanted to highlight a few of
- 17 the questions that you guys had already asked
- 18 today, but some -- add some stories or some
- 19 experience from our own clients and from my
- 20 representation of our clients.
- 21 So I wanted to start with the door
- 22 knock. I understand that the utilities have a
- 23 concern for the safety of their employees. I also
- 24 have a concern for the safety of the consumers.
- 25 And I think the way that you can make that

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- 1 compromise is they have the discretion, if they
- 2 feel that their safety is at risk, they have the
- 3 discretion to not do the knock.
- 4 But in a lot of low income
- 5 neighborhoods, especially in multifamily complexes
- 6 or buildings, we find that mail is frequently
- 7 stolen or is frequently not delivered appropriately
- 8 or adequately. So those -- that knock on that door
- 9 might be the only notice that an individual
- 10 receives that they're being disconnected.
- 11 And so you might ask, well, if they
- 12 haven't been paying their bill, wouldn't they know
- 13 that they were going to be disconnected? A lot of
- 14 individuals have representative payees for their
- 15 Social Security who might be outside of their home
- 16 and perhaps the Social Security got messed up,
- 17 there's a problem with the receipt of the check.
- 18 So those things kind of add to each other, and at
- 19 some point they will be disconnected but they may
- 20 not be aware that that is coming.
- 21 Laclede Gas gave an example also of
- 22 that is an opportunity for payment. A lot of
- 23 clients if they know that the disconnection might
- 24 be coming or they've been trying to get the money
- 25 together, they might have the money available to

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- 1 them. They just haven't been for disability or for
- 2 whatever reason able to get in to make the payment.
- 3 If there's a knock on the door to do the contact,
- 4 that might be a way for them to give the payment at
- 5 the last minute to prevent disconnection.
- 6 Obviously we wouldn't want that to be a routine
- 7 practice, but I think that's an opportunity also
- 8 for the utility companies to get some money at that
- 9 point.
- 10 JUDGE WOODRUFF: As I recall from
- 11 reading the comments from I don't remember which
- 12 utility company, some of them do not accept money
- 13 at the door; is that correct?
- 14 MS. LINGUM: I could understand how
- 15 that would be a problem for security. They might
- 16 not want their employees walking around with that
- 17 money. But I think if you are in a situation where
- 18 there's an individual who is disabled or has other
- 19 limitations that might not make them able to leave
- 20 their home to make the payment, I think it would be
- 21 in the utility's best interests to accept the money
- 22 from that person at that door knock because that is
- 23 the way to ensure that they're going to receive the
- 24 money.
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: Or at least not

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- 1 disconnect and tell them to make other arrangements
- 2 to deliver the money?
- 3 MS. LINGUM: Exactly. I wanted to
- 4 touch a little bit on the credit score as well.
- 5 Ms. Hutchinson touched a lot on some of the
- 6 comments I wanted to make, but I think it's
- 7 important to note that the utility companies would
- 8 like to use credit scores to determine whether or
- 9 not someone should be able to get service without
- 10 paying a deposit. Unfortunately, those utility
- 11 companies are also not reporting to the credit
- 12 agencies.
- 13 So I don't think it's an accurate
- 14 assessment of the risk of whether or not an
- 15 individual's going to be paying their utility bills
- 16 because utility payments are not the same -- as
- 17 Chairman Kenney has pointed out in his questions,
- 18 utility bills are not the same as a department
- 19 store card. They're not the same as a cell phone
- 20 bill. Utility bills often take priority in
- 21 households when they have limited income.
- 22 Additionally, relying on credit
- 23 scoring can be inconsistent and inaccurate because
- 24 a lot of utility -- or excuse me, a lot of credit
- 25 reporting agencies base credit scores on different

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- 1 circumstances and different types of information.
- 2 I know that when I personally applied to get a
- 3 mortgage last year, they pulled all three of my
- 4 credit scores from each of the credit reporting
- 5 agencies, and those three credit scores varied by
- 6 50 points just for me personally. So I think that
- 7 could become problematic depending on what score
- 8 and what company that they're using.
- 9 With regard to the deposits, I kind
- 10 of want to put this in perspective because \$300 to
- 11 \$500 is a lot of money for one of my clients,
- 12 especially if it's a client who is a low income
- 13 individual who's living in subsidized housing or if
- 14 they're receiving only disability income.
- So if they're receiving a disability
- 16 check of \$700 a month and they have to pay a 3- to
- 17 \$500 deposit to receive utilities, to get their
- 18 utilities connected so that they can live, that's
- 19 half of their monthly income that they have to pay
- 20 to get their services just turned on.
- 21 So at that point they're going to
- 22 then have to decide which bills they're going to
- 23 pay that month and which bills they're not going to
- 24 be able to pay from the very limited income that
- 25 they have.

With regard to denial of service, I

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- think that it's so important that the denial of
 service be in writing for individuals to know that
 if they're applying for utility assistance, instead
 of just getting -- you know, over the phone being
- 6 told we can't give you assistance, you don't
- 7 qualify, you don't apply or you'll have to pay this
- 8 deposit, it needs to be in writing, especially if
- 9 we are using credit scores to determine whether or
- 10 not an individual has to pay a deposit or whether
- 11 or not they can get those services because of the
- 12 Fair Credit Reporting Act.

1

- 13 The Fair Credit Reporting Act
- 14 requires that if you're using credit scores or
- 15 credit reporting to deny someone assistance, you
- 16 have to respond to them, and you have to respond to
- 17 them with the information about what you relied
- 18 upon to make that determination. So I think that
- 19 would go hand in hand with the credit reporting.
- 20 And then billing dates, that was
- 21 another question. Being able to set a billing date
- that works for the customer is in everyone's best
- 23 interests because of the timing of disability
- 24 checks but also of the timing of subsidized housing
- 25 utility allowances. Individuals who live in

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- 1 subsidized housing may receive -- especially if
- 2 they're lower income individuals, may receive a
- 3 monthly check from the housing authority for their
- 4 monthly utility bill, but the housing authorities
- 5 often only cut those checks once a month in the
- 6 beginning of the month or in the middle of the
- 7 month depending on what routine that they have.
- 8 It's just -- it's in the best
- 9 interests of the utility companies to ensure that
- 10 the clients can make the payments and not get
- 11 behind because it's a slippery slope once they do
- 12 get late and have those late fees tacking on to
- 13 them.
- I've also seen -- I do a lot of
- 15 housing work and representing tenants. I've seen
- 16 landlords use it because they understand that it
- 17 increases the likelihood of them actually receiving
- 18 payment. Instead of clients -- a lot of times
- 19 clients won't be able to pay all of their rent on a
- 20 certain date based on when they get their
- 21 disability check, or they might have to wait and
- 22 pay on the 5th of the month and they might have to
- 23 pay a late fee as well.
- 24 A lot of landlords will work with
- 25 tenants so that they can pay on the 5th of the

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- 1 month without having to pay a late fee even though
- 2 technically it's late because the landlords
- 3 understand that it's in their best interests to
- 4 work with them so that they can get paid.
- 5 And finally I wanted to touch on
- 6 payday loan arrangements. I'm concerned that this
- 7 practice will only lead to these customers digging
- 8 a bigger hole for themselves. It's a slippery
- 9 slope. And I think also for the utility companies
- 10 it will reduce the chance of continuing payments.
- 11 So they might receive a payment once or they might
- 12 receive payment for a while, but I have heard
- 13 nothing or I have seen nothing that shows me that
- 14 there is proof that those are the customers
- 15 actually making the payments and those are not
- 16 payday loans that they've taken out to make those
- 17 payments.
- 18 So we've heard that customers have
- 19 been taking cash to these pay stations to make
- 20 these payments, but I don't know that that's them
- 21 making the payment or if they've taken out a loan
- 22 to make that payment. I think it would be
- 23 important to look at that, perhaps do some research
- 24 or find some method to track whether or not it was
- 25 actually coming from the customer or if it was a

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- 1 payday loan that they used to actually pay that
- 2 utility bill.
- 3 The interest rates on these payday
- 4 loans are insane. They can go up to 500 percent,
- 5 and like I said, it's a slippery slope. A lot of
- 6 times our clients will take out payday loans to pay
- 7 off payday loans and it becomes a cycle. They're
- 8 required to write a postdated check, and the payday
- 9 lender continues to deposit that check every single
- 10 month to see if they have that money, but they
- 11 continue to add on and tack on the fees. So what
- 12 originally could have been a \$100 debt turns into
- 13 \$5,000, and that's not uncommon.
- 14 So I'm concerned that that will lead
- 15 to that slippery slope of trying to get that
- 16 utility paid because they're at the payday lending
- 17 station and the person is trying to encourage them
- 18 to take out a payday loan.
- 19 And finally, I -- I can't see that
- 20 there are not any alternatives in rural communities
- 21 to pay utility bills. I think it's in the
- 22 Commission's interests and in the state's interests
- 23 to work with consumers so that they can pay their
- 24 bills in a method that's not -- that's not onerous,
- 25 I understand that, but also that protects them from

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- 1 predators. And predatory lending, payday loans,
- 2 title loan places, they do engage in predatory
- 3 lending.
- 4 And so I think there are
- 5 opportunities, there are banks, there are post
- 6 offices. I understand maybe post offices won't
- 7 work, but there are other alternatives, and I
- 8 cannot believe that it is -- it has been found to
- 9 be otherwise. I have -- we have clients in rural
- 10 areas. We represent 21 counties in northeastern
- 11 and eastern Missouri. I have never had a client
- 12 who said they have driven 55 miles to pay a utility
- 13 bill. Often our clients don't even have the money
- 14 to pay the gas to get down the street let alone 55
- 15 miles.
- So for me, it's just hard for me to
- 17 see that there's not another alternative for these
- 18 payments in rural areas or anywhere to say the
- 19 least.
- That's all I have to for today. Do
- 21 you have any questions?
- 22 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: No questions.
- 23 Thank you.
- 24 COMMISSIONER W. KENNEY: No, thank
- 25 you.

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- 1 COMMISSIONER HALL: No questions.
- 2 Thank you.
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: Thank you. Was
- 4 there anyone else wishing to testify or comment on
- 5 behalf of the consumer agencies? Then we'll move
- 6 to Staff.
- 7 MS. JONES: Good afternoon. If it
- 8 may please the Commission? My name is Akayla, and
- 9 I'm representing the Staff of the Missouri Public
- 10 Service Commission. Akayla Jones. I'm sorry. In
- 11 addition, we have Staff members Gay Fred, Lisa
- 12 Kremer, Jim Merciel, Kay Niemeier and Tom Imhoff
- 13 available to answer any questions that you may
- 14 have.
- 15 I'd like to briefly just give a
- 16 summary of Staff's opinion regarding the rule
- 17 changes, then open the floor for any of the Staff
- 18 members to give more specific comments or answer
- 19 any additional questions you may have.
- The process for the parties to reach
- 21 this point has spanned over a period of eight
- 22 years. Various parties formed what became known as
- 23 a working group which consisted of representatives
- 24 of all gas and electric, the state's largest
- 25 regulated water and sewer utilities, the Office of

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- 1 Public Counsel, as well as consumer advocacy
- 2 groups, including AARP, Community Action Agency
- 3 Association, Consumer Council America and Legal
- 4 Services of Eastern Missouri.
- 5 Dating back to January of 2005 when
- 6 this endeavor first began, at least 400 hours have
- 7 been spent by the working group meeting to discuss
- 8 the revisions, additions and deletions of
- 9 Chapter 13 as a whole, and that's not including the
- 10 countless e-mails, individual considerations of
- 11 proposals, drafting of new proposals, et cetera, to
- 12 lead up to this point.
- 13 Staff supports the rule revisions as
- 14 published as a reasonable compromise between
- 15 varying interests in this matter. Staff has
- 16 reviewed and considered the written comments that
- 17 were submitted by OPC, Missouri utilities, KCP&L as
- 18 well as the joint comments between AARP, Consumer
- 19 Councils of Missouri and the Legal Services of
- 20 Eastern Missouri.
- 21 And after its review, Staff still
- 22 recommends that the position that's presented in
- 23 our comments, that being the Commission should
- 24 adopt the balance in the proposed revisions as
- 25 filed should be adopted.

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- 1 Staff believes that the proposed rule
- 2 changes adequately address the concerns with
- 3 Chapter 13 held not only by but also -- not only by
- 4 the Staff but also of the utility industry and the
- 5 consumer groups.
- 6 The proposed changes as published
- 7 represent a reasonable balance of rights between
- 8 utilities and the customers, and the Staff
- 9 recommends that the Commission adopt the revisions
- 10 to Chapter 13 as published in the Missouri Register
- 11 on September 3rd.
- 12 For the Commission's information,
- 13 Staff member Jim Merciel has prepared a document to
- 14 explain the potential edits to Chapter 3 to remove
- 15 some of the duplication should the Commission adopt
- 16 the addition of sewer utilities under Chapter 13's
- 17 purview.
- 18 The Chapter 13 billing practices are
- 19 much more extensive than those provided in
- 20 Chapter 3, and Staff recommends that the Commission
- 21 adopt the proposed change to add sewer utilities
- 22 under Chapter 13. This adoption will place sewer
- 23 utilities under the same set of standards as those
- 24 of the other utility types regulated by the
- 25 Commission.

Page 129 And staff offers at this time the 1 2 document that's been premarked as Staff Exhibit 1 3 for admission into the rulemaking record. JUDGE WOODRUFF: Okay. 4 5 (STAFF EXHIBIT NO. 1 WAS MARKED FOR 6 IDENTIFICATION BY THE REPORTER.) 7 MS. JONES: And again, there's numerous Staff members here were actually involved 8 in the rulemaking process extensively, and they're available to answer any questions that you may have 10 and also specifically address the knock rule, the 11 12 physician certificate as well as the credit scoring. So I'll open the floor to them. 13 14 JUDGE WOODRUFF: I do have one 15 question --16 MS. JONES: Yes. 17 JUDGE WOODRUFF: -- about Staff 1. These are possible rules in the future? These have 18 not actually been proposed; is that correct? 19 20 MS. JONES: Correct. This is a 21 proposal from Staff of the possible edits that may need to be for Chapter 3 based upon the rule 22 changes for 13. 23 2.4 JUDGE WOODRUFF: And Staff would propose these in the usual course of the way the 25

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| 1 | Staff proposes rulemakings? | |
| 2 | MS. JONES: Yes. | |
| 3 | JUDGE WOODRUFF: Okay. Questions? | |
| 4 | CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Who wants to talk | |
| 5 | about credit scoring? | |
| 6 | MS. FRED: Good afternoon. | |
| 7 | CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Ms. Fred, good | |
| 8 | afternoon. Thank you. | |
| 9 | JUDGE WOODRUFF: You need to identify | |
| 10 | yourself for the record. | |
| 11 | MS. FRED: Gay Fred, consumer | |
| 12 | services manager for the Missouri Public Service | |
| 13 | Commission, here in Jefferson City, P.O. Box 360, | |
| 14 | Jefferson City, Missouri. | |
| 15 | CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Thank you. | |
| 16 | MS. FRED: You're welcome. | |
| 17 | CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Can you share with | |
| 18 | me your thoughts about, I'll say the need to use | |
| 19 | credit scoring, and secondarily whether the use of | |
| 20 | credit scoring for determining deposits properly | |
| 21 | reflects the distinction between the purchase of | |
| 22 | utility services and the purchasing of other | |
| 23 | consumer goods? | |
| 24 | MS. FRED: Certainly. Credit | |
| 25 | scoring, when the working group began looking at | |

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- 1 this subject matter, we were not educated on this
- 2 matter. Therefore, there was a lot of discussion.
- 3 But realizing we were not that familiar with credit
- 4 scoring, the attributes added into the credit
- 5 scoring, methodology and formulas, we decided we
- 6 needed to become better educated.
- 7 In doing that, we actually asked for
- 8 a representative to come in and educate us on
- 9 credit scoring. And you may be familiar with
- 10 myFICO, which actually consists of an accumulation
- 11 of scores of either -- well, with Experian, Equifax
- 12 and TransUnion.
- Our approach for even addressing this
- 14 was the fact that currently under the rule the
- 15 requirement for a deposit is somewhat subjective,
- 16 and our concern was, is the subjective approach the
- 17 most appropriate approach for assessing a deposit
- on the appropriate consumer?
- 19 And so we decided that there was a
- 20 need to look into other alternatives and determine
- 21 what would be the best approach, what would be the
- 22 best approach for actually assessing a deposit on a
- 23 customer who is more likely not to pay, therefore
- 24 guaranteeing the continuation of their service by
- 25 the use of that deposit that's on hand.

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- 1 And in doing that, we found there was
- 2 an objective approach, and that would be credit
- 3 scoring. Now, one could argue credit scoring is
- 4 not appropriate because it takes a lot of factors
- 5 into account, but keep in mind there are different
- 6 methodologies. The attributes is what really makes
- 7 the difference.
- 8 As Laclede has indicated, they use a
- 9 credit scoring methodology and the attributes that
- 10 are more based on customer behavior to utility
- 11 services. We talked to the experts in this field
- 12 and found out there could be the use of that if
- 13 that's what the preference was for the utility
- 14 company to use the model that's more geared to
- 15 utility services, that they have that methodology
- 16 and that process in place.
- 17 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Is there only one
- 18 vendor that has that methodology?
- MS. FRED: No.
- 20 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: There are multiple
- 21 vendors to choose from?
- MS. FRED: There's multiple vendors
- 23 that have that methodology in place. However, you
- 24 have to specifically request that, you know. If
- you're not requesting that specific methodology,

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- 1 then of course they're going to take into account
- 2 the methodology that's used for getting a loan
- 3 perhaps for a home or a car or something of that
- 4 nature.
- 5 But even though we've gone through
- 6 the education and we went through the process in
- 7 developing language and we felt like, you know, it
- 8 was viable to consider this alternative because it
- 9 was more of a scientific analysis and not a
- 10 subjective analysis, there was a lot of discussion
- 11 among the working group.
- 12 And Staff, trying to come to a
- 13 compromise, felt that it was worthwhile to still
- 14 consider the use of credit scoring but at the same
- 15 time leave in the existing criteria, the prima
- 16 facie requirements for those who maybe could not
- 17 come up with a credit score.
- 18 A student, for example, who just gets
- 19 out of college, mom and dad was kind enough to pay
- 20 for your student loans and take care of their
- 21 education, but they have no credit established.
- 22 They would pop up with no credit score. So it
- 23 didn't seem fair to penalize them if they can meet
- 24 some of the other prima facie requirements. So we
- 25 left those in place as an alternative.

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- In addition, as you've already heard
- 2 testified here today by the utilities, some do not
- 3 have the ability to actually do credit scoring in
- 4 place, and it may take some time for them to obtain
- 5 that capability, so they may also fall on that same
- 6 what is currently in the rule of the criteria.
- 7 The other concerns I've heard from
- 8 the advocates is the use of this credit score and
- 9 then the need for large -- perhaps large deposit.
- 10 I'd like to point out, the deposits are always
- 11 assessable over an installment plan, that it's not
- 12 necessarily required all up front, that it can be
- 13 taken over a period of months. Generally speaking,
- 14 that's three months. Could be four. It's kind of
- 15 a negotiating factor between the consumer and
- 16 utility to go beyond four months, how much longer
- 17 can it go, but it is there and available.
- 18 One of the other points I might make
- 19 note of is, kind of along the same lines, when
- 20 we're talking about credit scoring and deposits, is
- 21 I've heard the comment that deposits could be as
- 22 high as 3 to \$500. That may be, but I can tell you
- 23 that on average, an average bill is approximately
- 24 \$80 a month. Two times that average would be a
- 25 \$160 deposit. Spread over four months, you're

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- 1 looking at \$40 a month to pay that deposit.
- 2 We do not take deposits during
- 3 November 1st to March 31st during the Cold Weather
- 4 Rule, at which time deposits are prohibited.
- 5 Again, I think we're trying to find that balance,
- 6 what makes sense, what's fair to all consumers.
- 7 And so in looking at credit scoring, we're trying
- 8 to make the balance between those who are more at
- 9 risk versus those who are not at risk, and taking
- 10 into account uncollectibles could grow very quickly
- 11 if not somehow controlled and then all ratepayers
- 12 end up paying that through their rates.
- 13 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: This actually is a
- 14 good seque into my next question about the
- 15 proposal, I think it was OPC's proposal about
- 16 making it mandatory to allow consumers to set their
- 17 billing date. Is there any evidence that that
- 18 would decrease late pays and uncollectibles? Does
- 19 Staff have any opinion about that?
- MS. FRED: Well, I know that some
- 21 companies actually do allow that, but at the same
- 22 time there are many that do not simply because of
- 23 the number of cycles they have to process bills in,
- 24 and that's based on their number of customers that
- 25 they actually serve.

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- I don't have any studies that would
- 2 indicate that a preferred payment date would make
- 3 their viability of paying their payments more on
- 4 time just or not. I can say that as far as most
- 5 utilities, if a customer's having difficulty in
- 6 making a payment, if they contact that utility or
- 7 even if they contact the Public Service Commission
- 8 hotline, many times we're able to get those
- 9 payments extended. We call that an extension for
- 10 payments. So that is available today, and I would
- 11 foresee that to continue.
- 12 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Let me ask one
- 13 additional question about deposits, because I
- 14 thought I read somewhere that deposits are
- 15 typically not just -- well, what's the discretion
- 16 for the utility to charge the deposit? Can it be
- more than two times the average monthly bill?
- 18 MS. FRED: It's two times the highest
- 19 or four times the average. And we have had reviews
- 20 of various utilities' data to determine whether or
- 21 not one was greater than the other. It does appear
- 22 to be that four times the average is the lower of
- 23 the two compared to two times the highest.
- 24 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: So it's two times
- 25 the highest or four times the lowest?

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| 1 | MS. FRED: Four times the average. |
| 2 | CHAIRMAN KENNEY: The average. So if |
| 3 | the average is 80 bucks, then it would be 320? |
| 4 | MS. FRED: Right. But your bill |
| 5 | could be \$380 for one month. So two times that |
| 6 | would be significantly more. |
| 7 | CHAIRMAN KENNEY: Okay. Thank you. |
| 8 | MS. FRED: You're welcome. |
| 9 | JUDGE WOODRUFF: Commissioner Kenney? |
| 10 | COMMISSIONER W. KENNEY: Now, but |
| 11 | that is determined in the tariff, right, whether |
| 12 | it's going to be it's either two or four times |
| 13 | and the tariff would would we determine that? |
| 14 | MS. FRED: I think would be |
| 15 | determined by you in the rule, and I think there |
| 16 | was a point of clarification suggested that it be |
| 17 | one of the two of the lower ones. However, as you |
| 18 | also heard, some utilities may not have both |
| 19 | methodologies in place to make that determination. |
| 20 | So if you say two times the average or four |
| 21 | times two times the highest or four times the |
| 22 | average. |
| 23 | COMMISSIONER W. KENNEY: Whichever is |
| 24 | stated in their tariff? |
| 25 | MS. GAY: Right, whichever is stated |

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- 1 in their tariff.
- COMMISSIONER W. KENNEY: Now, on the
- 3 credit score, is that going to be determined in the
- 4 tariff, whatever -- what that number is?
- 5 MS. FRED: Yes. The number itself
- 6 would be stated in the tariff, not in the rule.
- 7 And I'll make one more comment on that. When we
- 8 were going through this process and looking at
- 9 statewide, there is quite a definite difference in
- 10 the eastern side of the state, the western side of
- 11 the state and the rural area of the state, or if
- 12 you want to look at a third metropolitan area, the
- 13 Springfield area.
- 14 You often think that everybody's the
- 15 same, but when you study and you look at the data
- 16 from all the various customers throughout the
- 17 state, you'll see quite a difference in customers,
- 18 customers' behaviors, customers' payment behavior,
- 19 the amount they pay, the housing stock. St. Louis,
- 20 for example, has very old housing stock. So I
- 21 agree with Ms. Hutchinson that many times customers
- 22 in the St. Louis City area are paying much higher
- 23 bills than customers, say, in the Kansas City area
- 24 because simply because that housing stock is so old
- 25 and it may not be weatherized or it maybe cannot

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- 1 even be weatherized to the point that it makes it
- 2 be more affordable and comfortable for the consumer
- 3 living in that housing stock.
- But when we look at these numbers, we
- 5 had to take all of that into account. When I say
- 6 we, Staff took all of that into account in
- 7 reviewing those numbers and trying to figure out
- 8 what's the best balance here. And it's unfortunate
- 9 that we have that old housing stock in the eastern
- 10 side of the state, but I think we're -- you know,
- 11 we promote, we support weatherization efforts as
- much as we can to try to help that area out.
- But nevertheless, we have these
- 14 issues that we continue to struggle with somewhat
- 15 beyond our control.
- 16 COMMISSIONER W. KENNEY: Thank you.
- 17 JUDGE WOODRUFF: Commissioner Hall?
- 18 COMMISSIONER HALL: Are we sticking
- 19 on the deposit issue for now or moving on to other
- 20 issues?
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: Whatever you want to
- 22 do. If you want -- we might need to bring up a
- 23 different witness.
- 24 COMMISSIONER HALL: I wanted to talk
- 25 about the physician's certificate.

Page 140 1 MS. FRED: That would be me. COMMISSIONER HALL: What is the 2 3 problem that you're trying to address? MS. FRED: Here again, the problem 4 5 that we're trying to address is whether or not we're making a subjective judgment or factual 6 7 judgment. And I'll give you the example. 8 Currently there are utilities that actually have physicians on staff, doctors on staff that when they get a request for an emergency extension, they 10 are -- the customer is asked to complete an 11 12 application, it's sent in to the company, and a 13 physician looks at it. The physician judges whether or not that is emergency enough to warrant 14 15 the extension of their service until that emergency health condition is resolved or at least another 16 17 alternative for paying for service or obtaining service is taken care of. 18 19 However, the majority of our 20 companies do not have those physicians or nurses on 21 staff and it is simply sent in to someone like 22 myself, a layman on medical terms, and they have what they refer to as a criteria list. So they go 23 24 down, they look at the application, they look at the criteria list. If the customer doesn't fall 25

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- 1 within that criteria list, no, they're not granted
- 2 an emergency extension. If they do fall within
- 3 that criteria list, then they may apply for an
- 4 extension.
- 5 Being on Staff and handling the
- 6 number of complaints we get on a monthly basis,
- 7 annual basis, and as I think one of our witnesses
- 8 has testified, an increase or a number of contacts
- 9 that we get along those lines, it became evident
- 10 that this is not something that's just started but
- 11 is going to continue to grow because, as
- 12 Ms. Hutchinson indicated, our senior citizen -- our
- 13 citizens are aging more and more, and we have more
- 14 people who have medical conditions than what we had
- 15 seen in the past.
- 16 So Staff felt like rather than let
- 17 this be subjective, we needed to determine some way
- 18 to make it an objective decision. So I reached out
- 19 to our other state public utility commissions. I'm
- 20 on the consumer affairs subcommittee for NARUC, and
- 21 so I sent out an e-mail to all my fellow colleagues
- 22 and said, what does your state do in this
- 23 situation?
- Well, there are a number of states
- 25 that have a number of rules in place for this, but

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- 1 I went and specifically spoke more in depth with
- 2 Arkansas and Oklahoma because they had the language
- 3 that you are seeing in the rule as proposed by
- 4 Staff. Now, I say that. It's not verbatim for
- 5 what they have, but it is for the most part what
- 6 they have in their state. And they indicated to us
- 7 that it works very well, it takes the subjective
- 8 judgment out, and they feel more comfortable by a
- 9 medical professional making the call than the
- 10 utility making the call.
- 11 So what you see in the proposed rule
- 12 is very similar to Arkansas' language. However, we
- 13 made a tweak. This was put out before the working
- 14 group. They were given the opportunity to make
- 15 comments and to make questions and statements about
- 16 this proposed rule. And in doing so, we tweaked
- 17 the language a little bit to try to accommodate and
- 18 come up with compromise. So that's what you have
- 19 before you.
- 20 So it is similar to what other states
- 21 are using. It has been tested, and it does work.
- 22 And that's why Staff adopted it for this proposed
- 23 rulemaking.
- 24 COMMISSIONER HALL: So if a customer
- or somebody in the household was on an oxygen

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- 1 machine, would -- in the typical case, would
- 2 cutting off electricity constitute a medical
- 3 emergency?
- 4 MS. FRED: No, and I'll tell you why.
- 5 An oxygenator is electrical, but most services also
- 6 provide portable means for oxygen. So if there is
- 7 no electricity, they have portable tanks they
- 8 switch to.
- 9 JUDGE WOODRUFF: Is there anything
- 10 else?
- 11 COMMISSIONER HALL: No.
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: Any other questions
- of other Staff witnesses in other areas?
- 14 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: No, thank you.
- 15 Thanks for your efforts.
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: I did have one
- 17 question --
- MS. FRED: Okay. Go ahead.
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: -- that came up, and
- 20 it's involving the definition of inquiry. Can you
- 21 explain the circumstances of that and why you want
- 22 to have that definition?
- MS. FRED: Yes. I kind of find this
- 24 ironic. Inquiry and complaint has been used by
- 25 the PSC since 2002 with the implementation of our

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- 1 electronic filing information system, EFIS.
- 2 Before, when calls would come in or comments would
- 3 come in from consumers and it was not necessarily a
- 4 complaint, someone was not disputing something,
- 5 they did not need us to investigate thoroughly into
- 6 something, they were simply making a call to our
- 7 office asking a question about a service charge or
- 8 service or a rate or whatever, it was a tick mark
- 9 on a piece of paper.
- 10 With EFIS, we actually implemented
- 11 terminology, complaint versus inquiry. An inquiry
- 12 was to be used for us to actually track those
- 13 contacts made to our office that would actually be
- 14 issues that my staff in consumer services or even
- 15 in operations or services staff would receive that
- 16 we could respond to and provide an answer to the
- 17 customer without it generating what I call an
- 18 investigation. So there was no need to enter it as
- 19 a complaint against a utility, as a complaint that
- 20 needed investigation, get all the customer account
- 21 information and proceed from there.
- 22 So the inquiry was a term that I felt
- 23 needed to be identified in the rule because
- 24 currently we don't have that identified in a form
- 25 that I felt was necessary for us truly to note what

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- 1 our actions are. The utilities often get inquiries
- 2 from their consumers, too. They're able to answer
- 3 the question and move on.
- 4 But this purpose in this rule was
- 5 simply for us to be able to clearly identify what
- 6 Missouri Public Service Commission is doing with
- 7 those customers making calls to our office and how
- 8 we're addressing those. And I did hear the comment
- 9 that, well, an inquiry could actually evolve into a
- 10 complaint, and that's true, very true. In some
- 11 cases if we have already entered it as an inquiry
- 12 and we've addressed it but the customer calls back,
- 13 then we'll actually create a complaint.
- But if it's an inquiry and we're not
- 15 certain of something, we might want to send it to
- 16 the utility, then it becomes a complaint.
- 17 Currently we do not have the capability to convert
- 18 that to a complaint. However, that is one of our
- 19 requests for our information systems department
- 20 that in the near future we make that modification.
- 21 But in the meantime --
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: How do you handle --
- 23 I'm sorry. You're about to answer.
- MS. FRED: In the meantime, we can
- 25 leave that inquiry in, close it out, reopen it as a

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- 1 complaint, enter the same information, or we can
- 2 cross reference it. So in other words, we can put
- 3 in a complaint, cross reference the inquiry, and
- 4 the reason for being -- for doing that process is
- 5 so that we're capturing the initial date and time
- 6 that customer contacted us, because that oftentimes
- 7 is key when we're investigating these issues or
- 8 inquiring into an item that becomes an
- 9 investigation.
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: Any other questions?
- 11 CHAIRMAN KENNEY: No, thank you.
- 12 JUDGE WOODRUFF: For anyone else on
- 13 Staff?
- 14 MS. FRED: Can I address the knock on
- 15 the door?
- JUDGE WOODRUFF: Certainly.
- 17 MS. FRED: I just felt it was
- 18 necessary that Staff point out that we did not
- 19 recommend altering the language to the knock on the
- 20 door. So the rule maintains the balance of
- 21 customers notice where utility deems it's safe and
- 22 then gives balance to the utility in keeping the
- 23 employees safe as well.
- 24 We have stories that we can tell you
- 25 ourselves of technicians getting beat up by

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- 1 baseball bats and ending up having to take
- 2 long-term disability, dogs attacking people. Lisa
- 3 Kremer's group has actually even gone out in the
- 4 field and gone with a technician in the field, and
- 5 they've seen situations that are somewhat unsafe
- 6 and scary.
- 7 So again, we see the value in the
- 8 knock on the -- the knock rule or the knock on the
- 9 door, but at the same time if there's potential
- 10 danger there, I think the utility ought to have the
- 11 ability to walk away, which the current rule does
- 12 include. So I just wanted to point that out, that
- 13 Staff was not advocating to change that language.
- 14 JUDGE WOODRUFF: Anything else from
- 15 Staff? Ms. Jones, was there anything else that you
- 16 want to present?
- 17 MS. KREMER: I might say one thing.
- 18 I'm Lisa Kremer. I'm the manager of engineering
- 19 management services.
- 20 And just one comment, what Gay
- 21 mentioned about the knock on the door, our staff
- 22 has gone out with utilities, in fact all of the
- 23 large utilities in the state except Empire, I
- 24 believe. We've spent weeks out with those
- 25 utilities.

Page 148 And I think Gay's point, it's not 1 2 just -- many times the companies don't know what's behind that door, and so that's just something I 3 wanted to add, that sometimes the safe environment, 4 5 it's just hard to determine that when they're out in the field. But like she mentioned, it was left 7 in the rule. JUDGE WOODRUFF: Okay. All right 8 then. I believe everyone who wished to speak has 10 been heard. So with that, we are adjourned. Thank 11 you. (WHEREUPON, the rulemaking hearing 12 13 concluded at 1:19 p.m.) 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25

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| 1 | CERTIFICATE |
| 2 | |
| 3 | STATE OF MISSOURI) |
| 4 |) ss. |
| 5 | COUNTY OF COLE) |
| 6 | |
| 7 | I, Kellene K. Feddersen, Certified |
| 8 | Shorthand Reporter with the firm of Midwest |
| 9 | Litigation Services, do hereby certify that I was |
| 10 | personally present at the proceedings had in the |
| 11 | above-entitled cause at the time and place set |
| 12 | forth in the caption sheet thereof; that I then and |
| 13 | there took down in Stenotype the proceedings had; |
| 14 | and that the foregoing is a full, true and correct |
| 15 | transcript of such Stenotype notes so made at such |
| 16 | time and place. |
| 17 | Given at my office in the City of |
| 18 | Jefferson, County of Cole, State of Missouri. |
| 19 | |
| 20 | |
| 21 | |
| 22 | |
| 23 | Kellene K. Feddersen, RPR, CSR, CCR |
| 24 | |
| 25 | |

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