

STATE OF NEW YORK

2038

2021-2022 Regular Sessions

IN ASSEMBLY

January 14, 2021

Introduced by M. of A. DINOWITZ, SEAWRIGHT -- read once and referred to the Committee on Consumer Affairs and Protection

AN ACT to amend the public service law, in relation to complaint handling procedures by the public service commission

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

1 Section 1. Section 43 of the public service law, as added by chapter
2 713 of the laws of 1981, subdivision 3 as added by chapter 686 of the
3 laws of 2002, is amended to read as follows:

4 § 43. Complaint handling procedures. 1. The commission shall maintain
5 regulations for the handling of [~~residential~~] all customer complaints,
6 which at a minimum shall require that each utility or municipality: (a)
7 maintain procedures, and provide a copy of those procedures, as amended,
8 to the commission, for prompt investigation of any complaint on a bill
9 for gas, steam, or electric service rendered or a deposit required and
10 for [~~prompt~~] reporting to the complainant [~~of~~] within: (i) fifteen busi-
11 ness days after the result of such investigation for a utility corpo-
12 ration; or (ii) thirty business days after the result of such investi-
13 gation for a municipality. [~~If such~~] Such report [~~is made orally, the~~
14 ~~utility corporation or municipality shall offer the complainant upon a~~
15 ~~written request the opportunity to receive the report in writing~~] shall
16 be in writing and provide all supporting documentation; (b) inform any
17 complainant [~~whose complaint is resolved in favor of the utility corpo-~~
18 ~~ration or municipality, in whole or in part,~~] of the availability of the
19 commission's complaint handling procedures; (c) refrain from terminating
20 service for nonpayment so long as a complaint is pending before a utili-
21 ty, municipality or the commission and for fifteen days thereafter, or
22 for such period as the commission for good cause shall establish;
23 provided however, that as a condition of continued service during the
24 pendency of any such dispute, a customer shall pay the undisputed
25 portions of any bill for service including bills for current usage, or

EXPLANATION--Matter in italics (underscored) is new; matter in brackets
[~~-~~] is old law to be omitted.

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1 such amounts as the commission determines reasonably reflect the cost of
2 usage to such customer; and (d) refrain from treating the disputed
3 portion of any bill as late during the pendency of any complaint before
4 the utility or municipality. Late payment charges shall not be levied
5 during the period it takes to resolve disputed amounts.

6 2. The commission shall maintain regulations for complaint handling
7 procedures including complaints with respect to the negotiation of a
8 deferred payment agreement which shall include, at a minimum: (a)
9 provision for investigation and informal review and for appeal to the
10 commission [~~in its discretion~~]; (b) that the burden of proof in all
11 proceedings shall be on the utility corporation or municipality [~~, except~~
12 ~~as otherwise provided by the commission for good cause~~]; and (c)
13 provision for parties to receive a written determination of any
14 complaint [~~, upon request,~~] in plain and simple English, which determi-
15 nation shall set forth the relevant facts established, the reasons for
16 the determination, what actions must be taken and what further proce-
17 dures are available to a complainant.

18 3. The commission shall [~~use its best efforts to~~] complete its initial
19 investigation [~~and review and to issue~~] within: (a) fifteen business
20 days for a utility corporation or; (b) thirty business days for a muni-
21 cipality. The commission shall complete the informal review, if the
22 initial decision is appealed, within fifteen business days. The commis-
23 sion shall, within ninety days, issue its final written determination of
24 any appeal to it pursuant to this section.

25 4. Failure by any utility corporation or municipality to provide a
26 response as provided by subdivision one of this section, shall invoke a
27 penalty of: (a) one hundred dollars per business day for each business
28 day that exceeds the initial fifteen business day period for a utility
29 corporation; or (b) twenty-five dollars per business day for each busi-
30 ness day that exceeds the initial thirty business day period for a muni-
31 cipality.

32 5. Upon the failure of the commission to adhere to the deadlines
33 provided by subdivision three of this section, the complainant may
34 commence a special proceeding against the commission pursuant to subdi-
35 vision one of section seventy-eight hundred three of the civil practice
36 law and rules. A prevailing complainant shall be entitled to reasonable
37 attorney's fees and court costs.

38 § 2. This act shall take effect on the ninetieth day after it shall
39 have become a law. Effective immediately, the addition, amendment,
40 and/or repeal of any rules and regulations necessary to implement the
41 provisions of this act on its effective date are authorized and directed
42 to be completed on or before such effective date.