



THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
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February 26, 2025

Mark D. Marini, Secretary
Department of Public Utilities
One South Station, 3rd Floor
Boston, MA 02110

**Re: *The Berkshire Gas Company, D.P.U. 24-PGAF-BERK;*
 Eversource Gas Company of Massachusetts d/b/a Eversource Energy,
 D.P.U. 24-PGAF-EGMA;
 Fitchburg Gas and Electric Light Company d/b/a Unitil, D.P.U. 24-PGAF-FGE;
 Boston Gas Company d/b/a National Grid, D.P.U. 24-PGAF-GRID;
 Liberty Utilities (New England Natural Gas Company) Corp. d/b/a Liberty Utilities,
 D.P.U. 24-PGAF-LIB;
 *NSTAR Gas Company d/b/a Eversource Energy, D.P.U. 24-PGAF-NSTAR***

Dear Secretary Marini:

On February 20, 2025, in the face of unprecedented increases to ratepayers' energy bills, the Department of Public Utilities ("Department") ordered the gas local distribution companies ("Companies") to reduce customer bills for the remainder of the winter heating season and to file revised reconciliation factors "in their cost of gas adjustment factor and local distribution adjustment factor dockets . . . on Monday, February 24, 2025, for effect on March 1, 2025."¹ Further thereto, the Department directed the Companies to collect any deferred costs, including carrying charges,² "through the local distribution adjustment factor during the off-peak season (i.e., May through October 2025)."³

¹ D.P.U. 24-PGAF-BERK; D.P.U. 24-PGAF-EGMA; D.P.U. 24-PGAF-GRID; D.P.U. 24-PGAF-FGE; D.P.U. 24-PGAF-LIB; D.P.U. 24-PGAF-NSTAR, Immediate Winter Rate Relief, at 1 (Feb. 20, 2025).

² *Id.* at 2 ("Each Company shall identify the carrying charge rate it proposes to apply to recoveries for these short-term deferrals. Consistent with current practice, the carrying charge rate shall be no higher than the prime rate, though the Department *expects* each Company to give due consideration to employing a lower carrying charge rate as a means of effecting additional bill relief for customers.") (emphasis added).

³ *Id.*

On February 21, 2025, the Attorney General [submitted a letter](#) to the Department requesting both immediate and long-term rate relief for the Companies’ customers. As requested in that letter, the Attorney General believes that the Companies should agree to forego carrying charges on any amounts proposed for deferral so that the overall impact on ratepayers is not increased due to the deferrals, and that the Companies should shoulder some of the high winter energy burden experienced by their customers.

As directed, on February 24, 2025, each of the Companies filed revised reconciliation factors with the Department. Thereafter, the Office of the Attorney General (“AGO”) requested until February 26, 2025, to comment on the Companies’ filings, which the Department granted.⁴ Accordingly, the AGO submits the following Comments for the Department’s consideration.

First, the AGO believes that the Companies’ proposed relief does not go far enough to alleviate the financial strains walloping ratepayers—indeed, their proposals do nothing to reduce what will likely be another round of extremely high gas bills for the month of February, which ratepayers will receive in March. Under the Massachusetts regulatory regime, the Companies are well-compensated for their delivery service and should be well-positioned to do more for their customers than these paltry and delayed deferrals.

Second, NSTAR Gas, Eversource Gas of Massachusetts (“EGMA”), Unitil, and Liberty all agreed to forego carrying charges on the deferred costs, thereby ensuring that customers do not pay increased amounts because of the deferral. National Grid and Berkshire Gas, however, declined to forego carrying charges and plan to charge their customers the customer deposit rate (i.e., 4.37 percent). The AGO strongly urges National Grid and Berkshire Gas to reconsider their position and agree to forego carrying charges on the deferred amounts to ensure their customers are not disadvantaged by the proposed deferral.

Third, the Companies’ filings lack sufficient clarity, transparency, and consistency. The Companies’ responses to the Department’s directive to deliver immediate winter rate relief to ratepayers are wide-ranging. Accordingly, the Department should require that the filings be uniform and transparent regarding how the two-months of rate relief will be applied (i.e., the impacted tariff) and subsequently recovered (i.e., the recovery period). Moreover, to the extent that some of the gas companies—including EGMA and NSTAR Gas—are unclear in their filings as to their company’s treatment of carrying costs, the Department should require each company to confirm that it will not collect carrying charges and direct each company to clearly state the portion of the filing that reflects this representation.

To better understand the position of each gas company, the AGO put together the table below to summarize key aspects of the Companies’ revised reconciliation factor adjustments for

⁴ Deadline for Comments on Revised Reconciliation Factors (Feb. 25, 2025).

residential heating customers (i.e., Rate R-3) for the months of March and April, 2025, including the treatment of the deferred costs.

	Berkshire⁵	EGMA⁶	NGrid⁷	Unitil⁸	Liberty⁹	NSTAR¹⁰
Est. Bill Reduction	13.1%	10.3%	10.0%	8.8%	7.5 – 8.2%	10.3%
Impacted Tariff ¹¹	LDAF	EES	LDAF	RAAF	EES, GAF & RAAF	EES
Carrying Charge Rate	Customer Deposit	None	Customer Deposit	None	None	None
Recovery Period	May-Oct 2025	Not provided	May-Oct 2025	May-Oct 2025	May-Oct 2025	Not Provided

The Department should direct the Companies to: (1) file bill impacts for both March and April, as well as the projected bill impacts during the off-peak season as a result of the deferrals (to the extent not already provided); and (2) provide comprehensive, multi-faceted communication plans to notify their customers of the expected bill impacts for both the remaining winter heating season and the off-peak season. The communications plans should employ customer-centric language that is clear, concise, and easily understandable to ratepayers, instead of utility legalese.

The AGO supports “accelerating efforts” by the Companies to promote budget billing programs and assistance programs for income-eligible customers, such as discount rates, Home

⁵ *Berkshire Gas*, D.P.U. 24-PGAF-BERK, Cover Letter (Feb. 24, 2025); Att. 1 [Tab. 10% Discount].

⁶ *EGMA*, D.P.U. 24-PGAF-EGMA, Cover Letter (Feb. 24, 2025). While the Company’s treatment of carrying costs is not clear (“the Company will not request any additional carrying charges other than what the Company would have otherwise collected absent this proposal for winter rate relief”), the AGO is under the impression that any monies deferred from March and April will be collected later in the year with no associated carrying charges.

⁷ *National Grid*, D.P.U. 24-PGAF-GRID, Cover Letter (Feb. 24, 2025).

⁸ *Unitil*, D.P.U. 24-PGAF-FGE, Cover Letter (Feb. 24, 2025); Att. 3 at 3.

⁹ *Liberty*, D.P.U. 24-PGAF-LIB, Cover letter (Feb. 24, 2025) and attachments and schedules. This analysis considers the Company’s February 20, 2025 proposal to increase its Peak GAF rate. In addition, the Company is proposing different rate relief for its Fall River and North Attleboro service area and its Blackstone service area. Regarding carrying costs, the Company claims that it “has not identified a carrying charge rate in its Revised Filing.”

¹⁰ *NSTAR Gas*, D.P.U. 24-PGAF-NSTAR, Cover Letter (Feb. 24, 2025). See discussion *supra* note 6 for the Company’s treatment of carrying charges.

¹¹ “LDAF” is Local Distribution Adjustment Factor; “EES” is Energy Efficiency Surcharge; “RAAF” is Residential Assistance Adjustment Factor; and “GAF” is Gas Adjustment Factor.

Energy Assistance Programs, and arrearage management plans¹² but, as stated in the Attorney General's February 21, 2025 letter, such assistance programs are merely one component of an overall strategy to provide lasting rate relief to customers. The AGO thus requests that the Companies significantly increase their efforts to proactively communicate to all customers the availability of payment plans if a customer is struggling to pay their bill, and to take steps to extend the availability of those payment plans for as long as possible to lessen customer burdens.

In addition, the AGO respectfully urges the Department to approve the request to extend the winter shut-off moratorium to April 1, 2025, which was submitted on February 7, 2025, by the National Consumer Law Center, the Home Energy Assistance Program network, the AGO, and representatives from the state's investor-owned gas and electric companies.

Finally, the AGO recognizes that this short-term measure is just the first step, and much more needs to be done to address energy affordability and bill transparency. The Department, exercising its authority to establish just and reasonable rates in the public interest, should take immediate steps to address the need for lasting rate relief—including re-examining certain cost drivers with a critical eye towards affordability—as further detailed in the Attorney General's letter on February 21, 2025. The AGO looks forward to working with the Department, the Companies, the Legislature, and the Healey-Driscoll Administration to address the ratemaking challenges brought to light this winter heating season, including through potential legislation to secure affordable, sustainable rates for customers as the Commonwealth continues to pursue a just and equitable clean energy transition.

Sincerely,

/s/ Elizabeth A. Anderson

Elizabeth A. Anderson

Matthew E. Saunders

Assistant Attorneys General

cc: Mathieu Cunha, Hearing Officer
Service Lists

¹² See, e.g., Berkshire Gas, D.P.U. 24-PGAF-BERK, Cover Letter, at 2; National Grid, D.P.U. 24-PGAF-GRID, Cover Letter, at 2. The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program provides eligible households with help in paying a portion of winter heating bills [<https://www.mass.gov/home-energy-assistance-programs>] and arrearage management plans give customers both a payment plan and bill credits for timely payments.

**COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC UTILITIES**

The Berkshire Gas Company

D.P.U. 24-PGAF-BERK

**Eversource Gas Company of
Massachusetts d/b/a Eversource Energy**

D.P.U. 24-PGAF-EGMA

**Fitchburg Gas and Electric Light
Company d/b/a Unitil**

D.P.U. 24-PGAF-FGE

**Boston Gas Company d/b/a National
Grid**

D.P.U. 24-PGAF-GRID

**Liberty Utilities (New England Natural
Gas Company) Corp. d/b/a Liberty
Utilities**

D.P.U. 24-PGAF-LIB

**NSTAR Gas Company d/b/a Eversource
Energy**

D.P.U. 24-PGAF-NSTAR

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that I have this day served the foregoing documents upon all parties of record in these proceedings in accordance with the requirements of 220 C.M.R. 1.05(1) (Department's Rules of Practice and Procedure). Dated at Boston this 26th day of February, 2025.

/s/ Elizabeth A. Anderson
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