

May 27, 2020

Attention: Filing Center

Public Utility Commission of Oregon P.O. Box 1088

Salem, Oregon 97308-1088

Re: UG 388 – NW Natural Request for a Rate Revision.

Attention Filing Center:

Attached for filing in the above-referenced docket is CAPO's response to Northwest Natural Gas Company's objection to Community Action Partnership of Oregon's Petition to Intervene.

Pursuant to the to OAR 860-001-0300(5), The Community Action Partnership of Oregon ("CAPO") responds to Northwest Natural Gas Company's ("Gas Company") objection, filed May 22nd 2020, to CAPO's petition to intervene in docket UG 388, otherwise know as the Gas Company rate revision request.

Gas company has protested the petition to intervene on the grounds that it would be an unreasonable burden on the rate case schedule and that intervening would unreasonably broaden the issues, OAR 860-001-0300(6). CAPO disagrees.

CAPO recognizes the late entry into the docket. Since the time of the original filing in December, a pandemic has struck America and killed 100,000 Americans while damaging the economy in broad economic terms. These circumstances couldn't have been foreseen when the original filing dates occurred. The conditions of the filing are different now then the conditions in December when the rate case began and the schedule was created. CAPO is concerned this rate increase will come at a time when low-income Oregonians will be struggling from the secondary economic damage caused by Covid-19. Insuring the low-income programs are functioning well is of heightened concern. Because of CAPO's concern for these programs and Gas Company's most vulnerable ratepayers, it is reasonable to grant intervening status to the agency serving those customers. Additionally, rate cases across the country are being delayed on the grounds of COVID-related reasons. It is not unreasonable for minor delays to address low-income issues, especially when those reasons are more important than ever in the current crisis.

Gas Company seeks to deny CAPO's petition because Gas Company contends the eligibility docket UM 2058 would be the better venue. CAPO disagrees. The eligibility docket is limited in scope and would not be a forum to address the larger issue of whether Gas Company should be administering low-income programs. UM 2058 is limited in scope to eligibility standards for enrolling into low-income gas assistance programs. UM 2058 will not address whether CAPO is the more appropriate party for administering low-income programs, including weatherization. Rate cases have historically been the proper venue for choosing the program administrator for utility-based programs. Previously, this commission has ordered through stipulations and

settlements for energy efficiency programs to be removed from Gas Company and to be administered by independent 3rd parties. CAPO seeks the same in this rate case.

Further, CAPO has sought relief in these matters directly from the company but no relief has been granted.

Gas Company notes that Oregon Housing and Community Services changed their administrative rules to temporarily provide relief to Community Action Agencies. While Oregon Housing did make this change, the change was made to the Oregon Energy Assistance Program, otherwise known as OEAP, the program delivers electric energy assistance. Gas company's own guidelines choose to follow the Low-income Heating Assistance Program ("LIHEAP") instead of OEAP. The Changes were limited in scope to the LIHEAP program and not OEAP. Further, Gas company does not have to meet federal restrictions that burden the Oregon Housing assistance programs. These restrictions include providing a social security card before receiving assistance. By following LIHEAP, and not OEAP, Gas Company creates increased hardships on our farm and migrant workforce. These workers have been deemed essential and many are having to work during this crisis. This policy disproportionately impacts these communities and Gas Company has ignored CAPO's request to ease these restrictions. The Oregon Utility Commission can depart from archaic federal programs that were created during Reagan administration, and choose a path where flexibility and affordability are possible for our struggling neighbors.

Our goal is aimed at keeping disconnections low and providing needed relief for struggling families. It is not unreasonable for an agency that relies on funding from rates to intervene in a case where rates will be increased in an economic downturn. CAPO is intervening on behalf of the vulnerable that will be impacted by this crisis. It is Community Action Agencies that will deal with the brunt of the hardship caused by the financial fallout of the Covid-crisis. Further, the crisis highlighted already-standing issues NWN has ignored, like eligibility standards and program administration.

Gas Company states that they care about their clients, but they refuse to listen to the very agencies serving their customers – these agencies that serve the most vulnerable Gas Company customers. Gas company has been steadfast in their refusal to hear low-income agencies on how to best serve ratepayers receiving energy assistance and weatherization.

CAPO has sufficiently shown interest in the proceedings and the petitioner's appearance and participation will not unreasonably broaden the issues, burden the record, or delay the proceedings. Because CAPO has shown interest in the proceedings and the petitioners's appearance and participation will not unreasonable broaden the issues, burden the record, or delay the proceedings, the Commission must grant the petition.



Keith Kueny
Energy Policy Coordinator

