



November 29, 2021

Oregon Public Utility Commission  
201 High Street SE, Suite 100  
Salem, OR 97301-3398

**RE: Follow-up to ORLA Letter dated 5/13/21 – Ongoing Relief for Small Businesses**

Chair Decker, Commissioner Tawney and Commissioner Thompson,

At the recent 11/17/21 meeting of the Public Utilities Commission (PUC), the Oregon Restaurant & Lodging Association (ORLA) reiterated its position as outlined in our letter to the PUC, dated 5/13/21. Namely, ORLA continues to request that the PUC:

- Move cautiously on disconnection of utility services, particularly on small business owners/ employers. All business has been decimated by COVID (including Delta, Mu and future variants). No business segment has been hit harder than Oregon's hospitality industry. That segment lost 38% of jobs compared to 9% job loss across all other segments. Hospitality hiring is trending upwards but remains far behind 2019, pre-COVID, pace.
- Convene workgroups of PUC commission, staff, utility service providers and small business stakeholders (including ORLA), to evaluate the full effects of COVID and the subsequent Orders and Directives of Governor Brown and the Oregon Health Authority, especially as it relates to business disruptions and closures. For restaurants and hotels to fully recover, ORLA is imploring all service providers – including utility service providers – to work closely with these small businesses and ensure the lights stay on, the water keeps running and the inventory is replenished so that these operators can grow their way back to health and prosperity.
- Work closely with the utility service providers, such as PGE, Pacific Power, NW Natural and others and relevant trade associations, such as ORLA, to develop a formulary seeking to cap, eliminate and/or restructure past due amounts and arrearages incurred by small businesses, especially those amounts directly resulting from COVID and ongoing government actions.
- Engage private sector utility counsel and advocates, such as Small Business Utility Advocates (SBUA) in all discussions and workgroups. For example, the expertise of Diane Henkels and Danny Kermode at SBUA will continue to be invaluable to ORLA and its nearly 3,000 members.

We have all learned a great deal over the last twenty months and counting. Those valuable lessons will serve us well in addressing future public health crises. Consideration of past dues and current rate relief, especially for small commercial rate payers like restaurants and hotels, needs to be a key component of ongoing economic recovery.

ORLA recognizes the leadership of the Public Utilities Commission and appreciates the PUC and all utility service providers for their partnership over the course of the last year and a half. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Greg Astley", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Greg Astley  
Director of Government Affairs