

§6104. Municipal and quasi-municipal water utilities subject to suspension, investigation, hearing and rate substitution

1. Application of this section. Notwithstanding section 310, any consumer-owned water utility that proposes to increase or decrease rates, tolls or charges may elect to set rates pursuant to this section. [PL 1995, c. 255, §7 (AMD).]

2. Utilities that elect to set rates under this section. Consumer-owned water utilities that elect to set rates under this section may not increase or decrease any rate, toll or charge without first holding a public hearing at which the Public Advocate and any customer may testify and may question the officials present regarding the proposed rate change. [PL 1995, c. 255, §8 (AMD).]

3. Notice of proposed rate change and hearing. The consumer-owned water utility shall, at least 14 days prior to the hearing, provide notice of the proposed rate change and the date, time, place and purpose of the hearing to its customers in a manner prescribed by the commission. Any such notice must include a statement describing the amount of the rate change and the percentage change for each customer class, the customer's right to request information relating to the present and proposed rates, the right to an open and fair hearing and the right to further hearings before the commission, and the availability of assistance from the Public Advocate. Any such notice must inform customers that they can petition the commission to investigate the proposed rate change and must include a statement that signatures on petitions filed pursuant to subsection 7 are invalid unless accompanied by the printed names and addresses of the signers. Any such notice must also inform customers that the utility will, upon request, provide customers with petition forms that include space for signatures and the printed names and addresses of the signers. Copies of all notices must be sent to the commission and the Public Advocate at least 14 days prior to the hearings. [PL 2023, c. 325, §3 (AMD).]

4. Notice that rate change may be investigated by commission. At the commencement of each hearing held pursuant to this section, the consumer-owned water utility shall inform those present that the rate change may be investigated by the commission in accordance with this section and that petitions filed pursuant to subsection 7 must bear the signatures and the printed names and addresses of the signers. Upon request, the utility shall provide customers with petition forms that include space for signatures and the printed names and addresses of the signers. [PL 1995, c. 255, §10 (AMD).]

4-A. Supporting materials. The water utility shall file a copy of all materials supporting the proposed rate change with the commission and the Public Advocate, at least 30 days prior to the hearing. A copy of all material supporting the proposed rate change shall be made available to customers for examination at the offices of the utility for at least 30 days prior to the hearing. The utility shall promptly provide any readily available relevant additional material or information requested by a customer, the commission or the Public Advocate. [PL 1995, c. 255, §11 (AMD).]

5. Filing changed rates. The water utility shall file its changed rates with the commission within 30 days of the public hearing, but not sooner than 10 days following the public hearing. [PL 1987, c. 141, Pt. A, §6 (NEW).]

6. Effective date established for rate change. Subject to the notice and waiver requirements of section 307, water utilities electing to set rates under this section may establish an effective date for a rate change of at least one month, but not more than 9 months, from the date the rates are filed with the commission. [PL 1987, c. 141, Pt. A, §6 (NEW).]

7. Authority to investigate rate changes. If, within 30 days of the public hearing, 15% of the customers of the consumer-owned water utility or 1,000 customers, whichever is less, file with the treasurer of the utility and with the commission petitions demanding a review of the rate changes by the commission, the rate change may be suspended, investigated, reviewed and changed in accordance with section 310, except that if a rate increase is more than 50% of the utility's annual operating revenues, the required number of petitions is 15% of the customers of the consumer-owned water utility or 500 customers, whichever is less. No suspension order issued by the commission pursuant to section 310 is effective for a period greater than 9 months from the date the rate changes were filed. [PL 1991, c. 52, §2 (AMD).]

8. Procedure for suspension of rate change. If the number of signatures on the petitions is 1,000 or if the number of signatures on the petitions equals or exceeds 15% of the customers indicated on the water utility's most recent annual report on file with the commission, the commission may suspend the rate change pursuant to section 310. The commission shall notify the water utility of the suspension. [PL 1987, c. 141, Pt. A, §6 (NEW).]

9. Water utility may challenge petitions. A consumer-owned water utility has 10 days from receipt of notice to notify the commission and the lead petitioner whether it intends to contest any aspect of the validity of the petitions, after which it loses that right. If the utility intends to challenge the validity of individual signatures on the petitions, it must identify, in its notice to the commission and lead petitioner, the specific signatures it is challenging and state the grounds for challenging each signature it believes is invalid. When the utility files its notice of intent to challenge the validity of the petitions, the utility shall provide the commission and the lead petitioner with a list of its customers. If the water utility notifies the commission in a timely fashion that it wishes to contest the validity of the petitions, the commission shall schedule a hearing. It shall hold the hearing and issue its decision on the validity of the petitions within 30 days of notification by the water utility that it intends to contest the validity of the petitions. If the commission finds the petitions to be invalid, it shall lift its order of suspension. For the purposes of this section, "customer" means, in the case of residential accounts, any one adult residing in a household where the utility's service is provided and, in the case of all other accounts where the utility's service is provided, a corporate officer, a partner or a proprietor. No more than one person may sign on behalf of an account. No person may sign on behalf of more than one account unless the person is a customer at each account.

Signatures on petitions filed pursuant to subsection 7 are valid only if accompanied by the printed names and addresses of the signers. If a petition filed pursuant to subsection 7 bears a sufficient total number of signatures but an insufficient number of printed names and addresses of the signers, the lead petitioner has 7 days from receipt of notice of the utility's challenge to cure the invalidity. If the utility's only challenge to a petition relates to the absence of printed names or addresses of the signers of the petition and the lead petitioner cures the invalidity as provided in this subsection, the commission is not required to hold a hearing under this subsection. [PL 1993, c. 589, §11 (AMD).]

10. Review of rates under section 310. Nothing in this section prohibits a consumer-owned water utility from petitioning the commission for review pursuant to section 310. [PL 2023, c. 325, §4 (AMD).]

11. Correction of errors. Upon review of a rate filing made pursuant to this section, the commission may order the municipal or quasi-municipal water utility to correct mathematical or clerical errors. [PL 1987, c. 141, Pt. A, §6 (NEW).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 1987, c. 141, §A6 (NEW). PL 1987, c. 490, §B12 (AMD). PL 1987, c. 628, §§2-4 (AMD).
PL 1989, c. 159, §§7,8 (AMD). PL 1991, c. 52, §2 (AMD). PL 1993, c. 589, §§9-11 (AMD). PL
1995, c. 255, §§7-11 (AMD). PL 2023, c. 325, §§3, 4 (AMD).

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