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BEFORE THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION OF UTAH

IN THE MATTER OF THE APPLICATION OF DOMINION ENERGY UTAH FOR RENEWAL OF THE LOW-INCOME ASSISTANCE PROGRAM PORTAL	Docket No. 23-057-23  APPLICATION
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Questar Gas Company dba Dominion Energy Utah (Dominion Energy or Company) respectfully submits this Application to the Utah Public Service Commission (Commission) and requests that the Commission allow the Company to continue to utilize the Low-Income Assistance Program Portal (Portal) and waive certain requirements of Utah Admin. Code § R746-406 for another year.

**BACKGROUND**

Dominion Energy works closely with a variety of governmental entities and non-profit organizations (Agencies) to enable those organizations to remit payment toward natural gas bills for qualified low-income individuals. More specifically, the Company's Customer Relations department works directly with Agencies who administer low-income assistance

programs like Utah's Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), the Utah Home Energy Assistance Target (HEAT), and the Company's REACH program.

Previously customers who needed assistance from any of the Agencies were required to provide the Agency with the customer's account number and a copy of the most recent bill in order to apply for payment assistance. However, it became commonplace for a customer to provide the Agency with the customer's account number but fail to provide a copy of the bill to the Agency. In these instances, the Agency and the customer would contact Dominion Energy and a Dominion Energy employee would provide the customer's usage and billing information. This process was administratively burdensome for both the Agencies and Dominion Energy.

In an effort to increase the efficiency of this process and to reduce the costs of assisting Agencies in distributing funds under the Programs, Dominion Energy developed and deployed a software web portal through which the Agencies can take a customer's account number, log in, and obtain current usage and billing information. Permitting this limited access to customer information enables swift and efficient distribution of low-income energy assistance funds, and prompt help customers who are struggling financially to maintain service.

On October 24, 2022, the Company filed an Application in Docket No. 22-057-19 seeking Commission approval to share customer usage and billing information with the Agencies, and for a related waiver of Utah Admin. Code § R746-406 (the Initial Application). In the Initial Application, the Company represented that it would enter into an agreement with each of the Agencies before providing access to the Portal and that those agreements would include certain protections to ensure that only Agency employees had access to customer information, and that the information would only be used for purposes of administering the low-income programs.

On November 10, 2022, the Utah Division of Public Utilities (Division) submitted a memorandum in response to the Initial Application recommending that the Commission approve the Initial Application but impose additional safeguards. Specifically, the Division recommended that the Commission require the Company to reapply for Commission approval for use of the Portal and a related waiver of Commission rules for at least the first three years of the program. The Division further recommended that when the Company re-applies, it provide (1) evidence showing the effectiveness of these customer data safeguards, (2) recommendations for additional safeguards or alterations to the program, and (3) an annual report showing how the program is functioning, including the number of customers these agencies are accessing the portal on behalf of.

The Division also recommended that the Commission only permit sharing with 13 specifically-identified agencies, that any incremental costs associated with the Portal be borne either by the Low-Income Assistance Fund or the Company, that the Company make every effort to ensure that its customer data isn't used to market products or services to customers, and that each agency sign a non-disclosure agreement prior to accessing the Portal.

On November 17, 2022, the Commission issued an Order Granting in Part and Denying in Part Motion for Waiver in Docket No. 22-057-19 (Order) granting the waiver and adopting the Division's recommended safeguards.

The Company created a contract and provided it to each of the Agencies addressing issues referenced in its Initial Application. A copy of that Agreement is attached hereto as DEU Exhibit 1. That Agreement contained robust provisions governing handling of confidential customer information. Additionally, upon entering the Portal, each Agency authorized user must again verify that they are authorized, and that they will maintain the information as confidential in

compliance with the Agreement. A screen shot of that confirmation page is attached as DEU Exhibit 2.

In March of 2023, the Company made the Portal accessible to the Agencies, and included the two-factor verification functionality discussed in the Initial Application. In September of 2023, the Company was able to deploy portal analytics to track and report usage of the Portal. Company also now has tracking functionality that allows it to gather data related to access to and usage of the Portal. The Company has provided as DEU Confidential Exhibit 3 a copy of an Access Report showing who has accessed the Portal and which customer information has been disclosed.<sup>1</sup>

### **DISCUSSION**

***A. The Portal Has Functioned Well, and a Continuation of the Waiver Granted in Docket No. 22-057-19 is in the Public Interest.***

The Access Report shows that Agency personnel accessed the Portal 7,359 times for 4,049 unique records from September 14, 2023 to November 2, 2023. Without the Portal, these verifications would have been performed with a phone call to the Company's Customer Relations department. The Portal is relieving administrative burden for both the Agencies and the Company, as anticipated. If the Commission grants this Application, the Portal will effectively eliminate thousands of phone calls per year, creating a more streamlined, more efficient process for distributing Low-Income Assistance to those who need it most.

***B. The Ordered Safeguards Are Effective, and There is No Need for Additional Safeguards.***

The Company and the Agencies have utilized the Portal without incident. There have been no known instances that would suggest that the ordered safeguards are insufficient or that

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<sup>1</sup> The Access Report shows all accesses to the portal from September 14, 2023, when the reporting function became available, through November 2, 2023.

additional safeguards are necessary. The Company, therefore, believes that the safeguards are functioning as expected and no additional safeguards are necessary.

***C. The Access Report Shows that the Portal is Functioning as Planned.***

As noted above, the Access Report details the number of customers for whom an Agency representative has accessed the Portal, and it evidences the efficiency that the Portal brings. Each of those references for access represent a possible call to the Company that has been avoided. The Portal has effectively streamlined the process and alleviated the burden previously experienced by both Company and Agency personnel. The Portal is functioning well, as planned.

***D. The Company has Only Provided Access to the Portal to Agencies that the Order Permits to have Access.***

Only those agencies permitted by the Order have had access to the Portal. More specifically, the following Agencies have had access to the Portal:

- The State of Utah,
- Bear River Association of Governments,
- Five County Association of Governments,
- Futures Through Training,
- Mountainland Association of Governments,
- Six County Association of Governments,
- Southeastern Utah Association of Local Governments,
- Uintah Basin Association of Governments,
- Utah Community Action Program,
- Ute Indian Tribe XI,
- Paiute Indian Tribe,
- Southeastern Idaho Community Action Agency, and

- The Salvation Army non-profit organization.

Providing continued access to each of these Agencies is in the public interest for the reasons set forth herein.

***E. There Have Been No Incremental Costs Associated With The Portal.***

As expected, the development and/or use of the Portal did not result in any incremental costs. Moreover, DEU Exhibit 3 shows that the Company's call center avoided holding thousands of telephone calls, permitting personnel to utilize their time elsewhere.

***F. The Company Has Made Every Reasonable Effort to Ensure that None of the Customer Data be Retained by the Agency or for Purposes Other Than Administration of Low-Income Assistance Funding.***

The Company has made every reasonable effort to ensure that none of the customers' data was retained by the agency or for purposes other than administration of the Low-Income Assistance Program. DEU Exhibits 1 and 2 show that the Company has taken reasonable steps to ensure that none of the customers' data will be retained by the agency or its employees for purposes other than administration of the Low-Income Assistance Program. The Agreement (DEU Exhibit 1) contains express confidentiality provisions that restrict use of the information. DEU Exhibit 2 also requires authorized users to agree to maintain the confidentiality of customer information, and to access it only for purposes of administering the Low-Income Assistance Program.

***G. Each Agency Has Signed a Non-Disclosure Agreement Prior to Accessing the Portal.***

The Agreement (DEU Exhibit 1) contains confidentiality provisions sufficient to protect customer data. Each agency has signed such an agreement. Copies of each agreement with each Agency are attached as DEU Exhibit 4.

**CONCLUSION**

The Portal has functioned as anticipated and has created a more efficient process for providing Low-Income Assistance to eligible customers. The Company has complied with and/or implemented all of the safeguards that the Division recommended and that the Commission adopted in Docket No. 22-057-19. Approval of the waiver referenced above for another year is just, reasonable and in the public interest.

THEREFORE, based on the foregoing, the Company respectfully requests that the Commission grant a continuing waiver of Utah Admin. Code § R746-460, as discussed and previously approved in Docket No. 22-057-19 and herein.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED this 1<sup>st</sup> day of December, 2023.

DOMINION ENERGY UTAH



Jennifer Nelson Clark

Attorney for Dominion Energy Utah

**VERIFICATION**

State of Utah            )  
                                  ) ss.  
County of Salt Lake    )

Kelly Mendenhall, being first duly sworn upon oath, deposes and states: he is the Director, Regulatory and Pricing of Dominion Energy, Inc.; he has direct personal knowledge of the matters addressed herein; he has read the foregoing Application; and the statements made in the Application are true and correct to the best of his knowledge, information and belief. The documents attached thereto are true and correct copies of the documents they purport to be.

  
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Kelly Mendenhall  
Director, Regulatory and Pricing

Subscribed and sworn to before me this   1   day of December, 2023.

  
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Notary Public





**CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

This is to certify that a true and correct copy of the Application was served upon the following persons by e-mail on December 1, 2023:

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