

Docket No. 160101-WS: Petition for rate increase by Utilities, Inc. of Florida and Utilities, Inc.

**Direct Testimony of Rhonda L. Hicks**, Appearing on Behalf of the Staff of the Florida Public Service Commission

Date Filed: March 20, 2017

1 **BEFORE THE FLORIDA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION**

2 **COMMISSION STAFF**

3 **DIRECT TESTIMONY OF RHONDA L. HICKS**

4 **DOCKET NO. 160101-WS**

5 **MARCH 20, 2017**

6  
7 **Q. Please state your name and address.**

8 A. My name is Rhonda L. Hicks. My address is 2540 Shumard Oak Boulevard;  
9 Tallahassee, Florida; 32399-0850.

10 **Q. By whom are you employed and in what capacity?**

11 A. I am employed by the Florida Public Service Commission (FPSC or Commission) as  
12 Chief of the Bureau of Consumer Assistance in the Office of Consumer Assistance &  
13 Outreach.

14 **Q. Please give a brief description of your educational background and professional  
15 experience.**

16 A. I graduated from Florida A&M University in 1986 with a Bachelor of Science degree  
17 in Accounting. I have worked for the Commission for 30 years, and I have varied experience  
18 in the electric, gas, telephone, and water and wastewater industries. My work experience  
19 includes rate cases, cost recovery clauses, depreciation studies, tax, audit, consumer outreach,  
20 and consumer complaints. I currently work in the Bureau of Consumer Assistance within the  
21 Office of Consumer Assistance & Outreach where I manage consumer complaints and  
22 inquiries.

23 **Q. What is the function of the Bureau of Consumer Assistance?**

24 A. The Bureau's function is to resolve disputes between regulated companies and their  
25 customers as quickly, effectively, and inexpensively as possible.

1 **Q. Do all consumers, who have disputes with their regulated company, contact the**  
2 **Bureau of Consumer Assistance?**

3 A. No. Consumers may initially file their complaint with the regulated company and  
4 reach resolution without the Bureau's intervention. In fact, consumers are encouraged to  
5 allow the regulated company the opportunity to resolve the dispute prior to any Commission  
6 involvement.

7 **Q. What is the purpose of your testimony?**

8 A. The purpose of my testimony is to discuss/outline the number of consumer complaints  
9 logged with the Commission against Utilities, Inc. of Florida under Rule 25-22.032, Florida  
10 Administrative Code, Consumer Complaints, from January 1, 2010, through December 31,  
11 2016. My testimony will also provide information on the type of complaints logged and those  
12 complaints that appear to be rule violations.

13 **Q. What do your records indicate concerning the number of complaints logged**  
14 **against Utilities Inc. of Florida?**

15 A. From January 1, 2010, through December 31, 2016, the Commission logged 218  
16 complaints against Utilities, Inc. of Florida.

17 **Q. What have been the most common types of complaints logged against Utilities Inc.**  
18 **of Florida during the period January 1, 2010, through December 31, 2016?**

19 A. During the specified time period, approximately sixty-eight (68%) percent of the  
20 complaints logged with the Commission concerned billing issues primarily related to improper  
21 billing. The remaining thirty-two (32%) percent of the complaints involved service issues  
22 primarily related to improper disconnections, outages, and other miscellaneous quality of  
23 service issues.

24 **Q. Do you have any exhibits attached to your testimony?**

25 A. Yes. I am sponsoring Exhibit RLH-1, which is a summary listing of customer

1 | complaints logged with the Commission against Utilities, Inc. of Florida pursuant to Rule 25-  
2 | 22.032, Florida Administrative Code. The complaints listed were received between January 1,  
3 | 2010, and December 31, 2016, and were captured in the Commission's Consumer Activity  
4 | Tracking System (CATS). The summary includes the date the complaint was received, the  
5 | CATS tracking number, the Pre-Close type, the Close Type, and whether the complaint is  
6 | related to service or billing.

7 | **Q. What is a Pre-Close Type?**

8 | A. A pre-close type is an internal category assigned to a complaint based solely on  
9 | information provided by a customer during the initial complaint. The pre-close type indicates  
10 | the type of issue at stake for the complaint. For example, a pre-close type may be improper  
11 | disconnect, outages, quality of service, or improper billing, to name a few.

12 | **Q. What is a Close Type?**

13 | A. A close type is the internal code assigned to each complaint once staff completes its  
14 | investigation of the initial complaint and a proposed resolution is provided to the customer.  
15 | The close type code indicates the category of rule violation, if any, the complaint is classified  
16 | under. For instance, a close type of WB would indicate a rule violation related to water billing,  
17 | and a close type of WS would indicate a rule violation related to water service. In some  
18 | instances, the pre-close type category will differ from the corresponding close type code  
19 | because staff's investigation will reveal facts not readily available based upon the customer's  
20 | initial complaint. For example, a customer may file a complaint regarding overbilling.  
21 | However, once staff investigates, they may determine that overbilling did not in fact occur,  
22 | and as such the close type code will differ to reflect that no overbilling took place.

23 | **Q. How many of the complaints summarized on your exhibit has staff determined**  
24 | **may be a violation of Commission rules?**

25 | A. Of the 218 complaints logged against Utilities, Inc. of Florida during the period

1 January 1, 2010, and December 31, 2016, staff determined that 53 complaints appear to be  
2 violations of Commission rules. These complaints have a Close Type which is indicated by a  
3 WB or WS.

4 **Q. What was the nature of the apparent rule violations?**

5 A. The majority of the apparent rule violations were related to meter reading inaccuracies,  
6 and customers being charged improper rates. The utility was also cited on several occasions  
7 for failure to provide complaint resolution prior to the established deadline.

8 **Q. Does this conclude your testimony?**

9 A. Yes, it does.

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**Utilities Inc. of Florida**  
**Listing of Customer Complaints**  
**Received January 1, 2010 Through December 31, 2016**

	<b>Received</b>	<b>CATS No.</b>	<b>Preclose Type</b>	<b>Close Type</b>	<b>S= Service B= Billing</b>
1	2/19/2010	0925991W	IMPROPER DISCONNECTS	GI-28	S
2	3/15/2010	0931077W	OUTAGES	GI-15	S
3	3/25/2010	0933409W	QUALITY OF SERVICE	GI-30	S
4	4/15/2010	0937498W	REPAIR	GI-11	S
5	4/22/2010	0938922W	DELAY IN CONNECTION	GI-29	S
6	5/24/2010	0945114W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
7	5/24/2010	0944986W	QUALITY OF SERVICE	GI-30	S
8	5/25/2010	0945324W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-30	B
9	5/26/2010	0945671W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
10	5/26/2010	0945808W	IMPROPER DISCONNECTS	GI-28	S
11	5/26/2010	0945760W	QUALITY OF SERVICE	GI-30	S
12	5/27/2010	0945856W	OUTAGES	GI-15	S
13	6/16/2010	0949405W	OUTAGES	GI-15	S
14	7/8/2010	0953404W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
15	7/30/2010	0958220W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
16	8/4/2010	0959146W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
17	8/9/2010	0960173W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
18	8/11/2010	0960661W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
19	8/30/2010	0964617W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
20	9/1/2010	0965052W	QUALITY OF SERVICE	GI-30	S
21	9/8/2010	0966196W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-05	B
22	9/8/2010	0966278W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
23	9/16/2010	0967923W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-49	B
24	9/23/2010	0969647W	QUALITY OF SERVICE	GI-30	S
25	10/4/2010	0971794W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-50	B
26	10/6/2010	0972214W	IMPROPER DISCONNECTS	GI-28	S
27	10/12/2010	0973381W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
28	10/13/2010	0973761W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
29	10/14/2010	0973994W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
30	10/20/2010	0975231W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
31	10/29/2010	0977171W	QUALITY OF SERVICE	GI-30	S
32	11/18/2010	0980798W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
33	11/19/2010	0981185W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
34	12/6/2010	0983267W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
35	1/7/2011	0988426W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
36	1/13/2011	0989522W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
37	1/21/2011	0990897W	QUALITY OF SERVICE	GI-30	S
38	1/25/2011	0991478W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
39	2/21/2011	0995722W	SAFETY ISSUE	GI-17	S
40	3/18/2011	0999690W	QUALITY OF SERVICE	GI-30	S
41	4/15/2011	1004129W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
42	5/4/2011	1007209W	QUALITY OF SERVICE	GI-30	S
43	6/16/2011	1014077W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
44	6/17/2011	1014396W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
45	8/8/2011	1023067W	QUALITY OF SERVICE	GI-30	S

	<b>Received</b>	<b>CATS No.</b>	<b>Preclose Type</b>	<b>Close Type</b>	<b>S= Service B= Billing</b>
46	10/11/2011	1033739W	QUALITY OF SERVICE	GI-30	S
47	10/14/2011	1034494W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
48	11/8/2011	1038463W	QUALITY OF SERVICE	GI-32	S
49	11/21/2011	1040502W	QUALITY OF SERVICE	GI-32	S
50	12/6/2011	1042425W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
51	12/8/2011	1042988W	SAFETY ISSUE	GI-17	S
52	12/13/2011	1043767W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
53	12/14/2011	1044241W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
54	12/15/2011	1044465W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-05	B
55	12/15/2011	1044281W	QUALITY OF SERVICE	GI-30	S
56	1/25/2012	1049999W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
57	2/13/2012	1052512W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-49	B
58	2/16/2012	1053196W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-32	B
59	2/20/2012	1053419W	QUALITY OF SERVICE	GI-30	S
60	2/21/2012	1053614W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
61	2/24/2012	1054174W	QUALITY OF SERVICE	GI-30	S
62	3/27/2012	1058214W	QUALITY OF SERVICE	GI-30	S
63	4/3/2012	1059076W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
64	4/5/2012	1059462W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
65	4/11/2012	1060210W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
66	4/12/2012	1060310W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
67	4/16/2012	1060717W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-50	B
68	5/8/2012	1063341W	IMPROPER DISCONNECTS	GI-30	S
69	6/6/2012	1066614W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-32	B
70	7/19/2012	1072538W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-05	B
71	7/19/2012	1072520W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
72	7/19/2012	1072557W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
73	7/19/2012	1072476W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-04	B
74	7/19/2012	1072521W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-04	B
75	7/19/2012	1072498W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-04	B
76	7/20/2012	1072612W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-03	B
77	7/20/2012	1072567W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-04	B
78	7/20/2012	1072599W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-04	B
79	7/20/2012	1072607W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-04	B
80	7/20/2012	1072669W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-04	B
81	7/20/2012	1072711W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-04	B
82	7/23/2012	1072883W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-04	B
83	7/23/2012	1072890W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-04	B
84	7/23/2012	1072956W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-04	B
85	7/24/2012	1073017W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-04	B
86	7/24/2012	1073056W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-04	B
87	7/24/2012	1073136W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-04	B
88	7/24/2012	1073185W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-04	B
89	7/25/2012	1073274W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
90	7/25/2012	1073212W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-04	B
91	7/25/2012	1073292W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-04	B
92	7/26/2012	1073377W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-04	B
93	7/26/2012	1073399W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-04	B
94	7/26/2012	1073407W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-04	B
95	7/26/2012	1073422W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-04	B
96	7/27/2012	1073583W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-04	B
97	7/27/2012	1073584W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-04	B
98	7/30/2012	1073923W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B

	<b>Received</b>	<b>CATS No.</b>	<b>Preclose Type</b>	<b>Close Type</b>	<b>S= Service B= Billing</b>
99	7/31/2012	1074065W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-04	B
100	8/1/2012	1074318W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-05	B
101	8/3/2012	1074544W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-04	B
102	8/6/2012	1074668W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-04	B
103	8/7/2012	1074865W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-04	B
104	8/14/2012	1075870W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-04	B
105	8/24/2012	1077430W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
106	9/5/2012	1079156W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-12	B
107	9/7/2012	1079749W	DELAY IN CONNECTION	GI-29	S
108	10/12/2012	1085272W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
109	12/26/2012	1094383W	OUTAGES	GI-15	S
110	1/2/2013	1095121W	OUTAGES	GI-15	S
111	1/2/2013	1095307W	OUTAGES	GI-15	S
112	1/3/2013	1095465W	OUTAGES	GI-15	S
113	1/14/2013	1096620W	OUTAGES	GI-15	S
114	1/14/2013	1096630W	OUTAGES	GI-15	S
115	1/14/2013	1096631W	OUTAGES	GI-15	S
116	1/14/2013	1096754W	OUTAGES	GI-15	S
117	1/22/2013	1097686W	OUTAGES	GI-15	S
118	2/14/2013	1101498W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-03	B
119	2/18/2013	1101720W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
120	3/22/2013	1105353W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
121	3/28/2013	1105952W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-05	B
122	3/28/2013	1106016W	SAFETY ISSUE	GI-17	S
123	4/4/2013	1106572W	IMPROPER DISCONNECTS	WS-50	S
124	4/5/2013	1106691W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
125	5/2/2013	1109329W	IMPROPER DISCONNECTS	GI-28	S
126	5/3/2013	1109442W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
127	5/13/2013	1110166W	QUALITY OF SERVICE	GI-30	S
128	5/30/2013	1111859W	REPAIR	GI-11	S
129	6/6/2013	1112495W	SAFETY ISSUE	GI-08	S
130	6/7/2013	1112650W	QUALITY OF SERVICE	GI-28	S
131	6/12/2013	1113050W	QUALITY OF SERVICE	GI-30	S
132	6/13/2013	1113257W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
133	6/28/2013	1114696W	DELAY IN CONNECTION	GI-29	S
134	7/22/2013	1116783W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
135	7/26/2013	1117411W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-05	B
136	7/30/2013	1117773W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-26	B
137	8/1/2013	1118116W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
138	8/7/2013	1118865W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
139	8/12/2013	1119224W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-30	B
140	8/21/2013	1120522W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
141	8/29/2013	1121532W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
142	9/26/2013	1124966W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
143	10/2/2013	1125651W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
144	11/8/2013	1129721W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
145	11/21/2013	1131110W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
146	11/26/2013	1131484W	QUALITY OF SERVICE	GI-16	S
147	2/19/2014	1139281W	QUALITY OF SERVICE	GI-30	S
148	3/4/2014	1140457W	IMPROPER DISCONNECTS	GI-28	S
149	3/6/2014	1140696W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
150	3/25/2014	1142628W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
151	6/10/2014	1149530W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B



	<b>Received</b>	<b>CATS No.</b>	<b>Preclose Type</b>	<b>Close Type</b>	<b>S= Service B= Billing</b>
152	9/9/2014	1158801W	DELAY IN CONNECTION	GI-25	S
153	9/19/2014	1160084W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
154	9/19/2014	1160049W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
155	11/7/2014	1165077W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
156	11/20/2014	1166253W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
157	12/12/2014	1168646W	IMPROPER DISCONNECTS	GI-25	S
158	12/18/2014	1169250W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
159	12/18/2014	1169295W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
160	1/7/2015	1170645W	IMPROPER DISCONNECTS	GI-28	S
161	1/22/2015	1172088W	IMPROPER DISCONNECTS	GI-28	S
162	3/24/2015	1177434W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
163	4/3/2015	1178289W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
164	4/8/2015	1178639W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
165	4/16/2015	1179238W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
166	4/21/2015	1179676W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-23	B
167	7/10/2015	1185956W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
168	8/13/2015	1189049W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
169	9/4/2015	1191132W	OUTAGES	GI-15	S
170	9/9/2015	1191412W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-01	B
171	9/15/2015	1192018W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-05	B
172	9/17/2015	1192257W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-01	B
173	9/17/2015	1192204W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
174	9/18/2015	1192407W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-01	B
175	9/21/2015	1192563W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-01	B
176	9/21/2015	1192602W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-01	B
177	9/22/2015	1192685W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-01	B
178	9/23/2015	1192905W	IMPROPER BILLS	PR-68	B
179	9/23/2015	1192819W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-01	B
180	9/23/2015	1192908W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-01	B
181	9/24/2015	1192968W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-01	B
182	9/24/2015	1193001W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-01	B
183	9/29/2015	1193490W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-05	B
184	10/14/2015	1194987W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-01	B
185	11/2/2015	1196510W	IMPROPER BILLS	WB-50	B
186	2/19/2016	1205948W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-32	B
187	2/29/2016	1206552W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
188	2/29/2016	1206631W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
189	3/30/2016	1208976W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
190	3/31/2016	1209070W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-05	B
191	4/22/2016	1210827W	IMPROPER BILLS	NJ-06	B
192	4/25/2016	1210968W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
193	4/29/2016	1211349W	IMPROPER DISCONNECTS	GI-15	S
194	5/6/2016	1211862W	OUTAGES	GI-15	S
195	5/9/2016	1212020W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
196	5/19/2016	1212922W	IMPROPER DISCONNECTS	GI-28	S
197	5/26/2016	1213380W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-32	B
198	6/15/2016	1214752W	DELAY IN CONNECTION	GI-29	S
199	6/20/2016	1215086W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-05	B
200	6/21/2016	1215097W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
201	6/28/2016	1215720W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-05	B
202	7/6/2016	1216237W	IMPROPER DISCONNECTS	GI-28	S
203	7/12/2016	1216667W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-32	B
204	9/8/2016	1222036W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-05	B

	<b>Received</b>	<b>CATS No.</b>	<b>Preclose Type</b>	<b>Close Type</b>	<b>S= Service B= Billing</b>
205	9/19/2016	1222817W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
206	9/23/2016	1223357W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
207	10/4/2016	1224183W	QUALITY OF SERVICE	GI-30	S
208	10/12/2016	1224960W	SEWER SERVICE QUALITY	NJ-99	S
209	10/21/2016	1225797W	IMPROPER DISCONNECTS	GI-28	S
210	10/21/2016	1225887W	SEWER SERVICE QUALITY	GI-34	S
211	10/28/2016	1226453W	IMPROPER DISCONNECTS	Open	S
212	11/22/2016	1228754W	QUALITY OF SERVICE	WS-17	S
213	12/5/2016	1229790W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
214	12/5/2016	1229823W	QUALITY OF SERVICE	GI-16	S
215	12/8/2016	1230354W	IMPROPER BILLS	GI-25	B
216	12/15/2016	1230946W	IMPROPER BILLS	Open	B
217	12/19/2016	1231199W	QUALITY OF SERVICE	GI-30	S
218	12/19/2016	1231205W	SEWER SERVICE QUALITY	GI-34	S

BEFORE THE FLORIDA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

In re: Application for increase in water and wastewater rates in Charlotte, Highlands, Lake, Lee, Marion, Orange, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, and Seminole Counties by Utilities, Inc. of Florida.

DOCKET NO. 160101-WS

DATED: March 20, 2017

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the testimony of Rhonda L. Hicks on behalf of the staff of the Florida Public Service Commission was electronically filed with the Office of Commission Clerk, Florida Public Service Commission, and copies were furnished by electronic mail to the following on this 20th day of March, 2017.

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