



June 26, 2024

Sent via email

Letter L-18-24

Re: Customer Choice Program – Dispute [REDACTED] / Access Gas Services Inc.

Dear [REDACTED],

The British Columbia Utilities Commission (BCUC) is in receipt of your Customer Choice dispute and has considered the evidence relating to this matter. The BCUC's findings are outlined below.

Nature of the Dispute

[REDACTED] (Customer) filed the dispute on the basis of an invalid agreement, citing an unauthorized signature.

Evidence and Other Considerations

The agreement at issue is between the Customer and Access Gas Services Inc. (Access Gas), and is dated June 21, 2022 (Agreement), purporting to come into effect August 1, 2022. The Customer filed the dispute on February 14, 2024.

According to the Customer they did not sign an agreement with the Gas Marketer and the signatory, [REDACTED], was not authorized to sign on their behalf. According to the Customer, the signatory is the Customer's son, and the Customer was not aware of the Agreement until January 2024 because the mode of payment was automatic withdrawal from the Customer's bank account.

On March 22, 2024, in an email to the BCUC, Access Gas stated that the Customer has closed their FortisBC Energy Inc. account, and Access Gas has waived all early termination fees surrounding the Agreement.

During the Third-Party Verification (TPV) call related to the Agreement, which was recorded and provided as evidence in the dispute, the signatory ([REDACTED]) confirmed they:

- Are legally authorized to act on behalf of the account holder;
- had been provided with a copy of the signed Agreement;
- agreed to a price of \$7.89 per GJ for a term of five years;
- understood that they may or may not save money in the Customer Choice Program; and
- had the right to cancel without penalty within 10 days.

As the matter has not been resolved directly between the Customer and the Gas Marketer, the BCUC has reviewed and adjudicated the matter.

BCUC Determination

Although the Customer has submitted that the signatory, [REDACTED], was not authorized to sign the Agreement on their behalf, the BCUC notes that the signatory represented that they had such authority. The BCUC also observes that the Customer acknowledges that they paid the amounts owing for the supply of gas under the Agreement with Access Gas for a period of approximately 16 months. Although the Customer states that they were unaware of these payments, as they were set up through automatic withdrawal from the Customer's bank account, the BCUC does not consider that Access Gas should be held responsible for this.

Further, the signatory confirmed their understanding of the key points of the Agreement, including the term and rate, that they may or may not save money by entering into the Agreement, and the cancellation provisions.

For these reasons, the BCUC finds the Agreement valid and binding.

As the BCUC understands the Customer has canceled their FortisBC Energy Inc. account, and Access Gas has waived all early termination fees surrounding the Agreement, the BCUC finds no further action is required.

Sincerely,

Original signed by Jessica O'Brien for:

Patrick Wruck
Commission Secretary

DD/jm
Enclosure

cc: Ms. Megan Sedawie
Unbundling Supervisor
Access Gas Services Inc.
meg.sedawie@accessgas.com

Mr. Charlie Barrotta
Vice President
Access Gas Services Inc.
charlie.barrotta@accessgas.com

An application for reconsideration of this determination can be made following the guidelines enclosed.



bcuc
British Columbia
Utilities Commission

Customer Choice Program

Dispute Reconsideration Guidelines

January 2012

British Columbia Utilities Commission
410, 900 Howe Street
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada V6Z 2N3

Telephone (604) 660-4700; Facsimile (604) 660-1102
B.C. Toll Free: 1-800-663-1385

Internet Email: customer.choice@bcuc.com
Website: <http://www.bcuc.com>

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CUSTOMER CHOICE PROGRAM

Dispute Reconsideration Guidelines

1.0 INTRODUCTION

If a Customer or a Gas Marketer believes the Commission has made an error in the course of making a decision on a dispute, either party may raise the issue for further review by applying to the Commission for reconsideration. The Commission will not reconsider a dispute decision on the basis that the parties are unhappy with the decision. For a reconsideration to proceed, the applicant is required to establish a *prima facie* case (a case that until it is rebutted establishes that an error has been made) that reconsideration is warranted.

The following is an outline of the reconsideration process for the Customer Choice Program. This outline is used by the Commission to determine whether to accept an application for reconsideration and how to proceed with that reconsideration.

2.0 STEPS IN THE DISPUTE RECONSIDERATION PROCESS

2.1 Submit a Dispute

Applications for reconsideration must be received by the Commission in writing within 30 days of the date of the disputed decision. An application for reconsideration must:

- identify the disputed decision to be reconsidered including the dispute number, FortisBC account number and gas marketer's name;
- state the legal or factual grounds upon which the decision should be changed;
- state the applicant's desired outcome;
- contain the name, address and telephone number of the applicant or the applicant's representative; and
- be signed by the applicant or the applicant's representative.

Applications should be addressed to Customer Choice Program and can be submitted via email, mail or fax to:

- Email: customer.choice@bcuc.com
- Fax: (604) 660-1102
- Mail: 410 - 900 Howe Street, Vancouver, BC V6Z 2N3

Once the Commission receives an application it will conduct an initial review to determine whether the application shall proceed.

2.2 The Reconsideration Process

The Commission considers written submissions from the parties involved in a dispute in two phases of the reconsideration process. These two phases are outlined in the sections below.

2.2.1 Phase I – Initial Review

In the interest of both efficiency and fairness, and before the Commission proceeds with a determination on the merits of an application for reconsideration, the application undergoes an initial screening phase. In this phase the applicant must establish a *prima facie* case sufficient to warrant full consideration by the Commission. The first phase is a preliminary examination in which the application is assessed in light of some or all of the following questions:

- Should there be reconsideration by the Commission?
- If there is to be reconsideration, should the Commission allow new evidence?
- If there is to be reconsideration, should it focus on the items from the application for reconsideration, a subset of these items or additional items?

Following the Commission's review of the application, the Commission issues a notice to the other party involved in the disputed decision requesting them to submit a response to the application for reconsideration by addressing those questions set out in the notice. Upon receipt of the other party's response, the Commission asks the applicant to provide reply comments to the response received from the other party.

After the first phase evidence has been received, the Commission generally applies the following criteria to determine whether or not a reasonable basis exists for allowing reconsideration:

- Has the Commission made an error in fact or law?
- Has there been a fundamental change in circumstances or facts since the initial decision?
- Is there new evidence or further information that was not taken into consideration in adjudicating the initial decision?

In addition, the Commission may exercise its discretion and decide to undertake reconsideration of a decision whenever it deems there is just cause. If the Commission decides that a request for reconsideration should proceed, the application moves on to Phase II of the process. If the Commission decides that reconsideration should not proceed, the Commission will provide all parties with written notice of its decision.

2.2.2 Phase II – Commission Reconsideration

If the Commission decides an application for reconsideration should proceed, the Commission issues a Phase II Reconsideration Notice to the Customer and the Gas Marketer outlining the issues to be reconsidered and whether new evidence is allowed and setting the schedule for submissions. In moving to Phase II of the reconsideration process, the Commission will consider written arguments addressing the substance of the issues approved for reconsideration. When submitting written arguments, the parties must copy each other and must respond on or before the dates set out in the Phase II Reconsideration Notice.

The Commission bases its decision on the application on the submitted arguments.

3.0 ALTERNATIVES TO THE RECONSIDERATION PROCESS

In addition to the Commission's reconsideration process, there are two alternatives available to parties who wish to challenge a Commission decision or the fairness of the process used by the Commission to arrive at the decision:

- File for leave to Appeal the Commission's decision with the Court of Appeal of British Columbia
- File a complaint with the Office of the Ombudsperson of BC

These options are discussed in more detail below.

3.1 File for Leave to Appeal to the Court of Appeal of BC

The *Utilities Commission Act* provides a second alternative for challenging a Commission decision. This alternative is by way of the Court of Appeal of British Columbia. The Court of Appeal will consider only alleged errors of law or jurisdiction.

An application to obtain leave to appeal to the Court of Appeal must be launched within 30 days of the Commission issuing its Decision. Applicants must first obtain the court's leave for the appeal before commencing the actual appeal. The court will sometimes take into consideration as a factor in granting leave whether or not the party applying has exhausted its other remedies. Therefore, the party applying for leave may also want to apply for reconsideration by the Commission at the same time.

If a participant chooses to pursue an appeal, the procedures may be quite complex and formal. Normally, lawyers become involved at this stage, as their knowledge of court procedures and legal arguments tends to be very useful. It is not necessary, however, to hire a lawyer in order to make an appeal to the Court of Appeal.

3.2 The Office of the Ombudsperson of BC

If a customer is not satisfied with the Commission's handling of a complaint, he or she may contact the provincial Ombudsperson's Office to review the process used. The BC Ombudsperson reviews the Commission's processes, including the process for resolving complaints. The BC Ombudsperson can recommend reconsideration of a matter because of an error in procedure, but cannot overturn a Commission decision.