



August 8, 2025

Sent via email

**Letter L-22-25**



**Re: FortisBC Energy Inc. – Complaint filed by J.S. – British Columbia Utilities Commission Decision**

Dear [REDACTED]:

The British Columbia Utilities Commission (BCUC) writes regarding your complaint (Complaint), submitted on January 10, 2025, regarding a disconnection of gas services by FortisBC Energy Inc. (FEI). In the Complaint, you state that FEI disconnected gas service to your residence following receipt of a high gas bill in December 2023. You note that the outstanding balance owing represented a marked departure from prior billing periods, during which your gas bills were significantly lower. You further state that a payment agreement with FEI was established. However, you state that the payment amounts were unaffordable.

When the BCUC reviews complaints, it considers whether the utility reasonably responded to the customer's concern(s) and whether the utility followed its approved tariff and the *Utilities Commission Act* (UCA). The BCUC is an independent regulatory agency of the Provincial Government that operates under and administers the UCA.

Based on our review of your Complaint and related correspondence provided in this matter, the BCUC is satisfied that FEI has acted in accordance with its General Terms and Conditions (Tariff)<sup>1</sup> and the UCA.

This letter outlines the BCUC's review process, and then provides a summary of your Complaint, the issues raised, the BCUC's review of each issue, and potential next steps you can take.

### **Review Process**

In reviewing FEI's response to your Complaint under the BCUC Customer Complaints Guide,<sup>2</sup> the BCUC has, among other things, referred to FEI's approved Tariff, which contains the terms and conditions of service between FEI and its customers, to ensure FEI's actions were in accordance with the Tariff.

The BCUC initiated the complaints process on January 10, 2025 following receipt of the Complaint. Both parties filed additional correspondence with the BCUC from January 10, 2025 to March 26, 2025.

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<sup>1</sup> The current version of the [Tariff](#) was approved by Order G-237-24 and came into effect July 1, 2024.

<sup>2</sup> [BCUC Customer Complaints Guide](#).

## **Complaint**

### Your position

In the Complaint, you explain that FEI disconnected gas services to your residence without giving you a reasonable opportunity to resolve the matter. You raise concerns about a significantly higher than expected bill issued in December 2023, which you assert was inconsistent with your prior usage and could have not been reasonably foreseen. You dispute FEI's explanation that access issues prevented accurate meter readings and that FEI has your contact information and likely attempted to access your property while you were unavailable.

You state that FEI "remains inflexible [...] and refuses to consider reasonable accommodations" despite your having provided FEI a proposed timeline to pay the full outstanding balance. Further, you state that "FEI pressured [you] into a [payment] agreement [you] could barely afford," and while you initially accepted the terms of the payment agreement, the amounts required were beyond your financial means at the time.

### FEI's position

FEI submits that the disconnection of gas service was conducted in accordance with its disconnection policies, following multiple attempts to collect an outstanding balance of \$21,721.79 as of January 9, 2025. FEI outlines a history of communication with you regarding a potential payment plan that began in March 2024. According to a payment agreement between you and FEI, dated October 21, 2024, you committed to pay \$7,000 upfront (which was received), followed by \$5,000 payments each on November 30, 2024, December 30, 2024, and January 23, 2025. FEI states that it reconnected gas services on October 25, 2024 based on this payment agreement; however, only \$850 was received thereafter on December 9, 2024. Your gas service was subsequently disconnected on January 9, 2025 due to non-payment. FEI confirms your property remained disconnected as of March 26, 2025.

Regarding the high gas bill in December 2023, FEI confirms that this was the result of a catch-up invoice following 13 months of estimated readings due to persistent access issues. FEI attributed the increased consumption to your use of a pool heater, confirmed during a call on November 28, 2023. During the call, FEI states that it advised of ongoing access issues and offered to establish a payment plan, which you declined at that time.

While FEI notes that you provided consistent access for monthly readings from December 2023 onwards, it asserts it made over 100 contact attempts since 2013 to resolve meter access concerns, including calls, mailed letters/emails, and self-reported meter readings. In 2023, FEI states that contact attempts were made to resolve access issues in June, July, September, and November. FEI acknowledges it may accept self-reported readings but emphasizes the need to obtain periodic actual meter readings for billing accuracy and public safety. Finally, FEI submits that if access issues persist after standard communication efforts have been exhausted, it will continue billing on an estimate basis until access is granted.

## **Determination**

The BCUC has reviewed the Complaint and the submissions provided by the parties and finds that FEI has correctly applied the relevant provisions of its Tariff.

While it is evident that a significant number of your bills were based on estimated readings<sup>3</sup>, the Tariff does not impose a limit on the number of consecutive estimates that FEI may issue. The BCUC notes that FEI made repeated attempts to gain access to your meter, which were consistently unsuccessful. In this regard, the BCUC observes that Section 14.1 of the Tariff provides FEI a right of entry to a customer's premises and requires a customer to provide free access to such premises, at all reasonable times for the purpose of, among other things, reading or testing FEI's meters. Section 16.4 of the Tariff also allows FEI to estimate a customer's meter

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<sup>3</sup> Since the account was established in 2013, 77 percent of all bills were based on estimated readings. In 2023, 11 of the 12 bills were based on estimated readings.

readings for billing purposes if, for any reason, FEI does not obtain a meter reading. Notably, Section 16.4 of the Tariff does not impose a limit on the number of times an estimate may be applied.

With respect to the high bill issued in December 2023, the BCUC is satisfied that this bill reflected actual gas consumption at the premises. FEI's explanation that this was a catch-up bill following an extended period of estimated usage is supported by FEI's last meter reading on December 1, 2023, which reconciled the consumption for the previous 13 months of estimated readings. The BCUC notes that, under Section 8.2 of the Tariff, customers are responsible for all gas delivered to their premises and must pay accordingly. In this case, the evidence indicates that you did consume the gas and failed to provide consistent meter access for accurate readings. Further, the BCUC finds that FEI acted in accordance with Section 23.1 of the Tariff. Specifically, FEI is entitled to discontinue service, with at least 48 hours written notice, where a customer had not paid their bill by the due date. The BCUC notes that FEI undertook efforts to follow up on your outstanding balance and issued you a notice of disconnection more than 48 hours prior to discontinuing service.

In light of the above, the BCUC finds that you remain responsible for the full outstanding balance of \$21,721.79. However, the BCUC encourages FEI to engage with you to establish a reasonable payment arrangement to enable the recovery of the outstanding balance.

Based on the foregoing reasons, the BCUC finds that FEI's actions have been consistent with its duties and responsibilities as set out in its Tariff and the UCA. Accordingly, the Complaint is dismissed, and your file is now closed.

#### Panel Discussion

Although the BCUC finds no contravention of the Tariff, it does have concerns regarding FEI's conduct. The BCUC considers that FEI could have taken more proactive steps to address the extended period over which estimates of usage were used for billing purposes, such as by employing better communication processes to alert you of the potential consequences of ongoing estimated billing.

#### **Office of the Ombudsperson**

If you have concerns about how the BCUC handled your Complaint, you may wish to contact the Office of the Ombudsperson. The Office of the Ombudsperson receives enquiries and complaints about the practices and services of public agencies within its jurisdiction. Their role is to impartially investigate complaints to determine whether public agencies have acted fairly and reasonably, and whether their actions and decisions were consistent with relevant legislation, policies and procedures.

If you decide to file a complaint with the Ombudsperson, they will review the BCUC's process to ensure it was fair. Though this may not result in a different outcome for you, the office could request that the BCUC reopen its investigation. Provided is a link to the Office of the Ombudsperson's website: <https://www.bcombudsperson.ca>.

Sincerely,

*Electronically signed by Sara Hardgrave*

Sara Hardgrave  
Acting Commission Secretary

DC/jm

cc: [gas.regulatory.affairs@fortisbc.com](mailto:gas.regulatory.affairs@fortisbc.com)