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June 14, 2021

Ms. Holly Anderson, Clerk
Vermont Public Utility Commission
112 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05620-2701

Re: Case No. 20-0703-PET Vermont Legal Aid Request for Moratorium on Utility and Telecommunications Shutoffs During the State of Emergency

Dear Ms. Anderson:

The Town of Stowe Electric Department (“Stowe”) offers the following response to the Vermont Public Utility Commission’s (“Commission”) May 24, 2021 Order. As a public power utility owned by its ratepayers, Stowe is committed to supporting its customers during these difficult times.

Stowe encourages the Commission to lift the moratorium as soon as practicable. Stowe identified in previous filings in this docket that its customers are incentivized to contact staff about payment plans and resolving their arrearage when faced with a disconnection process. Without the threat of disconnection, customers are not taking full advantage of the options available to them. Stowe’s goal is to keep each customer connected and those with arrearages enrolled in a reasonable payment plan that will bring accounts current as soon as possible.

(a) A detailed description of how Stowe will engage our customers to resolve outstanding, past-due balances after the moratorium ends

Stowe will continue to communicate with those customers with past due utility bills and provide them with updated information on how to access financial assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Stowe will continue to utilize billing stuffers, our online payment

portal, website updates, and social media posts to educate our customers on how to resolve past-due balances, enroll in payment plans, and utilize available COVID-19 assistance programs. Stowe staff also communicate with its customers to engage the utility before they find their accounts in arrears to remain proactive.

Stowe staff received training on the Vermont Emergency Rental Program (“VERAP”) review portal and staff will continue to encourage customers to take advantage of this funding. Stowe will continue to work closely with community action groups to reach customers and to encourage customers to seek financial assistance.

Stowe will resume its business-as-usual process for disconnection and send out disconnection notices once the Commission lifts the moratorium on utility disconnections. If there is no response to the disconnection notice, Stowe will attempt to contact the customer via phone based on all available numbers for the customer and follow up with an e-mail. This business-as-usual involves multiple attempts to reach the customer, provide guidance, and negotiate a payment plan or pay agreement before taking any step to disconnect services.

Stowe internal oversight policies dictate that no customer disconnection will occur without approval from management staff. This policy recognizes that each customer’s financial situation is unique and requires a plan tailored for the customer to have a reasonable opportunity to resolve their arrearage.

Stowe has not assessed late fees on any customer arrearages since the Governor declared the State of Emergency in March 2020. Stowe will assess late fees on outstanding balances one billing cycle after the Commission lifts the moratorium. This will encourage customers to contact the utility regarding payment plans at which point Stowe can also educate them about current COVID-19 pandemic relief sources.

