



**Kansas
Gas Service®**

A Division of ONE Gas

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August 13, 2020

To: Special Committee on Economic Recovery
From: Patrick Vogelsberg, Manager of Government Affairs, Kansas Gas Service
Re: Impact of COVID-19 on utilities in Kansas

Chairwoman Lynn and members of the Special Committee on Economic Recovery,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide remarks on how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted Kansas public utilities. Kansas Gas Service, a division of ONE Gas, Inc., (“Kansas Gas Service”) is the state’s largest regulated natural gas utility, serving nearly 640,000 residential, commercial and industrial customers, across 360 communities.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Kansas Gas Service has remained committed to the safety of our customers and employees while providing safe, reliable natural gas service. Our business never shut-down its operations and we have not suffered layoffs or substantial reductions to work force due to COVID-19. Field Operations employees, including supervision, have continued to be at work each day of this pandemic to provide continued safe operation of our system and respond to emergencies. Those who remain in the field are following social distancing and hygiene guidelines and are utilizing additional personal protective equipment.

Despite the complications of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have continued to monitor and maintain our natural gas distribution pipelines, purchase the gas that fuels our customers’ homes and businesses, and have representatives available to address customer service needs. With that comes financial obligations the company must meet that allows us to maintain the quality of service our customers have come to expect and deserve.

Further, Kansas Gas Service understands the difficulties Kansans are facing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Utility customers in Kansas, and around the country, are struggling with growing past due amounts on their utility bills. In response, we have launched an aggressive effort to reach out to those customers who are in arrears specifically to offer payment options that may be available to them. Our outreach efforts are ongoing. Kansas Gas Service is also working closely with the Kansas Corporation Commission on this unfortunate situation.

Additionally, we provide our customers with information about potential financial assistance programs such as the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (“LIHEAP”) and the Salvation Army’s Share The Warmth. These programs may be available to help with the payment of utility services during these difficult times. To further support our community, the ONE Gas Foundation has also provided \$70,000 in grants to help nonprofits in Kansas provide emergency relief assistance to residents impacted by COVID-19.

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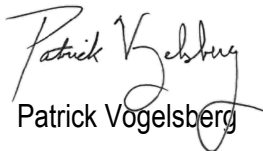
Much like other businesses, Kansas Gas Service has followed guidelines established by the Centers for Disease Control as it relates to safety requirements (mask, handwashing and social distancing). We are also tracking state and local orders closely. Having a service territory covering roughly two-thirds of the state has made tracking local health mandates important to ensure no local nuance is overlooked and we operate in full compliance. This tracking effort started with the local stay-at-home orders, progressed through the reopening plans and most recently focused on the mask mandates. We are also tracking school starting dates because many of our employees have school aged children.

As time progresses, experience will provide better guidance for our ongoing and future response to emergencies such as this pandemic and there will be opportunities to address what has worked and what has not. A question that Kansas Gas Service would like to assist in answering is: *How can policymakers provide predictability and consistency in the government's response to emergencies?* The answer to that question will differ depending on the industry asked. From our perspective greater predictability and consistency could be gained by providing a statewide standard that public utilities be permitted to continue operating regardless of state or local orders.

Furthermore, Kansas should statutorily designate public utilities as *first responders*. It is our belief that being statutorily designated as a first responder would eliminate confusion by local and state authorities as to a public utility's authority (and obligation) to more quickly respond to emergencies. We anticipate that this designation would also allow utilities to be granted the right to participate in more timely sharing of information between local health departments, law enforcement and public utilities.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee today. We look forward to working with the Kansas Legislature on policies that ensure Kansans continue to have energy security provided by safe, reliable and affordable natural gas.

Respectfully submitted,


Patrick Vogelsberg