

Introduced by Senator Soto

February 21, 2003

An act to amend Section 739 of the Public Utilities Code, relating to public utilities.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB 659, as introduced, Soto. Electrical corporations: rates.

(1) Existing law requires the Public Utilities Commission, at least until December 31, 2003, to require that all electrical corporation charges for residential electric customers are volumetric, and to prohibit any electrical corporation from imposing any charges on residential consumption that are independent of consumption unless the charges are in place prior to April 12, 2001.

This bill would remove the December 31, 2003, date restriction on that volumetric charge requirement, thereby making its operation indefinite. Because existing law makes a violation of a rule or order of the commission a crime, this bill would change the definition of a crime, thereby imposing a state-mandated local program.

(2) The California Constitution requires the state to reimburse local agencies and school districts for certain costs mandated by the state. Statutory provisions establish procedures for making that reimbursement.

This bill would provide that no reimbursement is required by this act for a specified reason.

Vote: majority. Appropriation: no. Fiscal committee: yes. State-mandated local program: yes.



The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. Section 739 of the Public Utilities Code is amended to read:

739. (a) The commission shall designate a baseline quantity of gas and electricity which is necessary to supply a significant portion of the reasonable energy needs of the average residential customer. In estimating those quantities, the commission shall take into account differentials in energy needs between customers whose residential energy needs are currently supplied by electricity alone or by both electricity and gas. The commission shall develop a separate baseline quantity for all-electric residential customers. For these purposes, “all-electric residential customers” are residential customers having electrical service only or whose space heating is provided by electricity, or both. The commission shall also take into account differentials in energy use by climatic zone and season.

(b) (1) The commission shall establish a standard limited allowance which shall be in addition to the baseline quantity of gas and electricity for residential customers dependent on life-support equipment, including, but not limited to, emphysema and pulmonary patients. A residential customer dependent on life-support equipment shall be given a higher energy allocation than the average residential customer.

(2) “Life-support equipment” means that equipment which utilizes mechanical or artificial means to sustain, restore, or supplant a vital function, or mechanical equipment which is relied upon for mobility both within and outside of buildings. “Life-support equipment,” as used in this subdivision, includes all of the following: all types of respirators, iron lungs, hemodialysis machines, suction machines, electric nerve stimulators, pressure pads and pumps, aerosol tents, electrostatic and ultrasonic nebulizers, compressors, IPPB machines, and motorized wheelchairs.

(3) The limited additional allowance shall also be made available to paraplegic and quadriplegic persons in consideration of the increased heating and cooling needs of those persons.

(4) The limited additional allowance shall also be made available to multiple sclerosis patients in consideration of the increased heating and cooling needs of those persons.

(5) The limited additional allowance shall also be made available to scleroderma patients in consideration of the increased heating needs of those persons.

(6) The limited allowance shall also be made available to persons who are being treated for a life-threatening illness or have a compromised immune system, provided that a licensed physician and surgeon or a person licensed pursuant to the Osteopathic Initiative Act certifies in writing to the utility that the additional heating or cooling allowance, or both, made available pursuant to this subdivision is medically necessary to sustain the life of the person or prevent deterioration of the person's medical condition.

(c) (1) The commission shall require that every electrical and gas corporation file a schedule of rates and charges providing baseline rates. The baseline rates shall apply to the first or lowest block of an increasing block rate structure which shall be the baseline quantity. In establishing these rates, the commission shall avoid excessive rate increases for residential customers, and shall establish an appropriate gradual differential between the rates for the respective blocks of usage.

(2) In establishing residential electric and gas rates, including baseline rates, the commission shall assure that the rates are sufficient to enable the electrical corporation or gas corporation to recover a just and reasonable amount of revenue from residential customers as a class, while observing the principle that electricity and gas services are necessities, for which a low affordable rate is desirable and while observing the principle that conservation is desirable in order to maintain an affordable bill.

(3) ~~At least until December 31, 2003, the~~ The commission shall require that all charges for residential electric customers are volumetric, and shall prohibit any electrical corporation from imposing any charges on residential consumption that are independent of consumption, unless those charges are in place prior to ~~the effective date of the act that added this paragraph~~ April 12, 2001.

(d) As used in this section:

(1) "Baseline quantity" means a quantity of electricity or gas for residential customers to be established by the commission based on from 50 to 60 percent of average residential consumption of these commodities, except that, for residential gas customers

1 and for all-electric residential customers, the baseline quantity
2 shall be established at from 60 to 70 percent of average residential
3 consumption during the winter heating season. In establishing the
4 baseline quantities, the commission shall take into account
5 climatic and seasonal variations in consumption and the
6 availability of gas service. The commission shall review and revise
7 baseline quantities as average consumption patterns change in
8 order to maintain these ratios.

9 (2) “Residential customer” means those customers receiving
10 electrical or gas service pursuant to a domestic rate schedule and
11 excludes industrial, commercial, and every other category of
12 customer.

13 (e) Wholesale electrical or gas purchases, and the rates charged
14 therefor, are exempt from this section.

15 (f) Nothing contained in this section ~~shall~~ *may* be construed to
16 prohibit experimentation with alternative gas or electrical rate
17 schedules for the purpose of achieving energy conservation.

18 SEC. 2. No reimbursement is required by this act pursuant to
19 Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution because
20 the only costs that may be incurred by a local agency or school
21 district will be incurred because this act creates a new crime or
22 infraction, eliminates a crime or infraction, or changes the penalty
23 for a crime or infraction, within the meaning of Section 17556 of
24 the Government Code, or changes the definition of a crime within
25 the meaning of Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California
26 Constitution.

