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Washington Gas Should Pay \$1.5 Million in Penalties and Fix Long-Standing Customer Service Issues, Office of People's Counsel Tells Public Service Commission

BALTIMORE – Washington Gas & Light should pay at least \$1.5 million in civil penalties and submit a plan to fix its long-standing customer-service issues, the Maryland Office of People's Counsel told the Maryland Public Service Commission in a filing today. OPC's filing described an alarming decline in customer service quality since AltaGas, a Canadian holding company, acquired Washington Gas in 2018—an acquisition that the Commission conditioned on seeing improvements in customer service.

“Washington Gas's customer service problems started more than ten years ago, but have only gotten worse,” said People's Counsel David S. Lapp. “The Commission needs to act decisively to send the company a strong message that its poor performance will not be tolerated.”

Washington Gas's customer service representatives are taking on average more than nine minutes to answer customer calls. That time is 13 times *longer* compared to how long it took before Washington Gas committed to improving its customer service as part of the AltaGas acquisition. Because the wait time is so long, many customers hang up before reaching a service representative. The percentage of calls abandoned has more than doubled since the acquisition. And the amount of time

customers wait on hold to get resolutions to their inquiries is eight times higher than the industry standard.

As part of the Commission's approval of the AltaGas acquisition of Washington Gas, the company agreed "to devote resources necessary" to meet customer service quality and reliability levels as required under state regulations. Another condition required the company to file quarterly reports on customer service quality and to perform a root-cause analysis and develop a plan to improve its customer service. Washington Gas has failed to fully comply with the merger condition and with state regulations, according to OPC's filing.

"Immediate and strong Commission action is warranted to hold Washington Gas accountable and motivate it to improve its customer service," Lapp said.

"Customers are suffering but have nowhere to turn because they are captive to Washington Gas. The solution is for the Commission to take action."

The Maryland Office of People's Counsel is an independent state agency that represents Maryland's residential consumers of electric, natural gas, telecommunications, private water and certain transportation matters before the Public Service Commission, federal regulatory agencies and the courts.

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