



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

DIVISION OF PUBLIC UTILITIES & CARRIERS

Administration

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April 2, 2024

The Honorable Joseph J. Solomon, Jr.
Chairman – House Committee on
Corporations
State House
Providence, R.I. 02903

Re: H 7715 – An Act Relating to Public Utilities and Carriers – Termination of Service to Persons Who Are Disabled, Seriously Ill, or In Arrears of Payment

Dear Chairman Solomon:

The Division of Public Utilities and Carriers (Division) supports the intent of the proposed amendment to this chapter. It offers a reasonable update of serious illness termination protections when the duration of the illness is not specified. Additionally, we find this measure is consistent with other statutory provisions that define the difference between chronic and acute conditions. In light of that, the Division recommends that the amendment would be strengthened by adding a clear definition of “serious illness”.

Title 39 and the Commission’s Termination Rules mention both refer to “serious illness” and disability” in ways that make it clear that they are not intended as synonyms. Consequently, we would propose a definition based on Federal provisions (42 USC 12102(1)(C) and (3)(B)),

Seriously Ill” shall mean a condition that carries a high risk of mortality, negatively impacts quality of life and daily function, and/or is burdensome in symptoms, treatments, or caregiver stress. Provided, however, a serious illness shall not exceed six (6) months in duration. A serious illness that exceeds six (6) months in duration shall be deemed a “disability”.

The current language in this statute prescribes a 3-week termination protection period for unspecified serious illness duration. This offers very minimal benefit to customers facing an acute medical concern. The amendment to a 3-month period for unspecified duration would offer a meaningful protection to these customers while at the same time serves to reduce the number of reviews for extension initiated by the customer and conducted by the Division. For these reasons we support this amendment and offer

recommended additional language in the form of a definition of “seriously ill” to provide clarity for customers as well as the utilities and regulators.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Linda George". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the letter "e".

Linda George, Esq.

Administrator, RI Division of Public Utilities and Carriers

Cc. The Honorable Cherie L. Cruz

The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Corporations

Nicole McCarty, Esq., Chief Legal Counsel, Speaker of the House