

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2021 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

House Bill 2811

FISCAL
NOTE

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[Introduced March 01, 2021; Referred to the
Committee on Energy and Manufacturing]

1 A BILL to amend and reenact §24-2-1k of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, relating
 2 to the Public Service Commission; natural gas infrastructure; actual investment of capital
 3 and costs; and how utility’s expedited cost recovery are calculated and determined.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

ARTICLE 2. POWERS AND DUTIES OF PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION.

§24-2-1k. Natural gas infrastructure expansion, development, improvement and job creation; findings; expedited process; requirements; rulemaking.

1 (a) The Legislature hereby finds that:

2 (1) West Virginia is rich in energy resources, which provide many advantages to the state,
 3 its economy and its citizens;

4 (2) West Virginia is experiencing significant growth in the natural gas industry with the
 5 development of the Marcellus and Utica shale;

6 (3) West Virginia’s abundant natural gas reserves have created, and will continue to
 7 create, many benefits to the state and its citizens;

8 (4) Growth in the natural gas industry and its accompanying benefits require West Virginia
 9 to be proactive and increase the focus on the natural gas infrastructure in this state in order for
 10 those benefits to flow to the state and its citizens, including those citizens in areas unserved or
 11 underserved by natural gas utilities;

12 (5) A comprehensive program of replacing, upgrading and expanding infrastructure by
 13 natural gas utilities at reasonable cost to ratepayers will benefit the customers of the natural gas
 14 utilities, the public in West Virginia and the economy of the state, as a whole;

15 (6) A natural gas utility infrastructure program will create jobs, provide for continued and
 16 enhanced safety and reliability of aging natural gas infrastructure, provide for more economic
 17 natural gas utility service, and provide natural gas utility service to new customers in areas of the
 18 state that are unserved or underserved; and

19 (7) Natural gas utility infrastructure programs involve the investment of capital and the

20 incurrence of associated incremental costs. Accordingly, in order for the natural gas utility
21 undertaking those infrastructure programs to attract the necessary capital, the natural gas utility
22 should be permitted to recover the incremental rate of return, related income taxes, depreciation
23 and property taxes associated with the infrastructure programs commencing with the
24 implementation of an infrastructure program approved by the commission without waiting for, or
25 otherwise being subject to a commission requirement for, a full base rate tariff filing as more fully
26 described in subsection (f) of this section.

27 (b) Natural gas utilities may file with the commission an application for a multi-year
28 comprehensive plan for infrastructure replacements, upgrades and extensions. Subject to
29 commission review and approval, a plan may be amended and updated by the natural gas utility
30 as circumstances warrant. The recovery of costs in support of the plans and applications made
31 under this section shall be allowed in the manner set forth in this section if the proposed plans
32 have been found to be prudent and useful.

33 (c) ~~The application is~~ Applications made under this section are in lieu of a proceeding
34 pursuant to §24-2-11 of this code and shall contain the following:

35 (1) A description of the infrastructure program, in such detail as the commission
36 prescribes, and the projected annual amount (in approximate line sizes and feet), general
37 location, type, and projected installation timing of the facilities that the applicant proposes to
38 replace, construct and/or improve;

39 (2) The actual and projected net capital investments and their cost, on an annual basis, of
40 the replacement, construction or improvements;

41 (3) The projected starting date for the infrastructure program;

42 (4) The projected numbers of potential new customers, if any, that may be served by the
43 infrastructure program and the projected annual load of the customers;

44 (5) The projected cost of debt for the infrastructure program funding and the projected
45 capital structure for infrastructure program funding;

46 (6) Testimony, exhibits or other evidence that demonstrates the need for the replacement,
47 construction or improvement of facilities in order to provide and maintain adequate, efficient, safe,
48 reliable and reasonable natural gas service;

49 (7) A proposed cost recovery mechanism for actual and projected capital investments
50 under the infrastructure program consistent with this section; and

51 (8) Other information the applicant considers relevant or the commission requires.

52 (d) Upon filing of ~~the application~~ applications under this section, the applicant shall publish,
53 in the form the commission directs, which form shall include, but not be limited to, the anticipated
54 rates and, if any, rate increase under the proposal, by average percentage and dollar amount for
55 customers within a class of service, as a Class I legal advertisement in compliance with the
56 provisions of §59-3-1 *et seq.* of this code, the publication area to be each county in which service
57 is provided by the natural gas utility, a notice of the filing of the application and that the commission
58 shall hold a hearing on the application within 90 days of the notice; unless no opposition to the
59 rate change is received by the Public Service Commission within one week of the proposed
60 hearing date, in which case the hearing can be waived, and issue a final order within 150 days of
61 the application filing date. However, if ~~the proposed infrastructure program~~ an application made
62 under this section includes a request for extension of infrastructure into an unserved area and
63 another natural gas utility files to extend service to the same area, the commission may move that
64 extension request of each natural gas utility into separate proceedings to be considered
65 concurrently and extend the time period for issuing a final order on that portion of the proposed
66 programs beyond the 150 days.

67 (e) Upon notice and hearing, if required by the commission, the commission shall approve
68 the infrastructure program and applications made under this section and allow expedited recovery
69 of costs related to the ~~expenditures~~ actual and projected capital investments as provided in
70 subsection (f) of this section if the commission finds that the ~~expenditures and the associated rate~~
71 ~~requirements~~ actual and projected capital investments are just, reasonable, not contrary to the

72 public interest and will allow for the provision and maintenance of adequate, efficient, safe, reliable
73 and ~~reasonably priced~~ natural gas service: Provided, That the utility's expedited cost recovery of
74 the costs calculated as provided in subsection (f) of this section shall not be made subject to: (1)
75 Any caps, limitations, or restrictions however derived on actual or projected capital investments,
76 the costs related to the actual and projected capital investments as provided in subsection (f) of
77 this section or the rates calculated to recover such costs; or (2) a requirement to file or to refrain
78 from filing a full base rate tariff filing.

79 (f) Upon commission approval, natural gas utilities will be authorized to implement the
80 infrastructure programs and applications made under this section and to recover related ~~related~~
81 ~~incremental~~ costs related to actual and projected capital investments, net of contributions to
82 recovery of return and depreciation and property tax expenses directly attributable to the
83 infrastructure program provided by new customers served by the infrastructure program
84 investments, if any, as provided in the following:

85 (1) An allowance for return shall be calculated by applying a rate of return to the average
86 ~~planned net incremental increase to rate base attributable to~~ cumulative actual rate base as well
87 as projected rate base under the infrastructure program ~~for the coming year, considering the~~
88 ~~projected amount and timing of expenditures under the infrastructure program plus any~~
89 ~~expenditures in previous years of the infrastructure program.~~ The rate of return shall be
90 determined by utilizing the rate of return on equity authorized by the commission in the natural
91 gas utility's most recent rate case proceeding or in the case of a settled rate case, a rate of return
92 on equity set forth in such settlement or, if none is set forth in such settlement as determined by
93 the commission, and the projected cost of the natural gas utility's debt during the period of the
94 infrastructure program to determine the weighted cost of capital based upon the natural gas
95 utility's capital structure.

96 (2) Income taxes applicable to the return allowed on the infrastructure program shall be
97 calculated for inclusion in rates.

98 (3) ~~Incremental depreciation~~ Depreciation and property tax expenses directly attributable
99 to the infrastructure program shall be estimated for the upcoming year.

100 (4) Following commission approval of its infrastructure program and its applications made
101 under this section, a natural gas utility shall place into effect rates that include an increment that
102 recovers the allowance for return, related income taxes, depreciation and property tax expenses
103 associated with the natural gas utility's ~~estimated~~ actual and projected capital investments under
104 the infrastructure program investments for the upcoming year, net of contributions to recovery of
105 those ~~incremental~~ costs provided by new customers served by the infrastructure program
106 investments, if any, ("~~incremental~~ cost recovery increment"). In each year subsequent to the order
107 approving the infrastructure program and ~~an incremental~~ a cost recovery increment rate, the
108 natural gas utility shall file a ~~petition~~ an application with the commission setting forth a new
109 proposed ~~incremental~~ cost recovery ~~increment rate~~ rate based on projected capital investments to be
110 made in the subsequent year, plus any under-recovery or minus any over-recovery of actual
111 ~~incremental~~ costs for the preceding year attributable to the infrastructure ~~program~~ program's
112 actual investments, ~~for the preceding year~~.

113 (5) In calculating the cost recovery of the allowance for return, related income taxes,
114 depreciation and property tax expenses associated with the actual and projected total capital
115 investments under the infrastructure program, there shall be no requirement imposed on the gas
116 utility to reduce actual or projected total capital investments under the infrastructure program or
117 infrastructure program rate base: (A) For any amount of, or any amount representative of, return,
118 income taxes, depreciation expense, property tax expense or any other item embedded in the
119 gas utility's current base rates; or (B) for any amount of, or any amount representative of,
120 revenues or costs associated with actual or projected capital investments by the gas utility where
121 the costs associated with such capital investments are not the subject of the gas utility's
122 applications under this section.

123 (g) The natural gas utility may make any accounting accruals necessary to establish a

124 regulatory asset or liability through which actual ~~incremental~~ costs incurred and costs recovered
125 through the rate mechanism are tracked.

126 (h) Natural gas utilities may defer ~~incremental~~ operation and maintenance expenditures
127 attributable to regulatory and compliance-related requirements introduced after the natural gas
128 utility's last rate case proceeding and not included in the natural gas utility's current base rates.
129 In a future rate case, the commission ~~may~~ shall allow recovery of the deferred costs amortized
130 over a reasonable period of time to be determined by the commission provided the commission
131 finds that the costs were reasonable and prudently incurred and were not reflected in rates in prior
132 rate cases.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to amend the manner in which actual investment of capital and costs and a natural gas utility's expedited cost recovery are calculated and determined by the Public Service Commission.

Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.