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BEFORE THE
FLORIDA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

In the Matter of:

DOCKET NO. 20240099-EI

Petition for rate increase by Florida
Public Utilities Company.

PROCEEDINGS: SERVICE HEARING

COMMISSIONERS
PARTICIPATING: CHAIRMAN MIKE LA ROSA
COMMISSIONER ART GRAHAM
COMMISSIONER GARY F. CLARK
COMMISSIONER ANDREW GILES FAY
COMMISSIONER GABRIELLA PASSIDOMO SMITH

DATE: Wednesday, January 8, 2025

TIME: Commenced: 1:00 p.m. CST
Concluded: 2:55 p.m. CST

PLACE: Jackson County Agricultural Offices
2741 Penn Avenue, #3
Marianna, Florida

REPORTED BY: DEBRA R. KRICK
Court Reporter and
Notary Public in and for
the State of Florida at Large

PREMIER REPORTING
TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA
(850) 894-0828

1 APPEARANCES:

2 BETH KEATING, ESQUIRE, Gunster Law Firm, 215
3 South Monroe Street, Suite 601, Tallahassee, Florida
4 32301; appearing on behalf of Florida Public Utilities
5 Company (FPUC).

6 WALT TRIERWEILER, PUBLIC COUNSEL; PATRICIA
7 CHRISTENSEN, ESQUIRE, OFFICE OF PUBLIC COUNSEL, c/o The
8 Florida Legislature, 111 West Madison Street, Room 812,
9 Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1400, appearing on behalf of
10 the Citizens of the State of Florida.

11 SUZANNE BROWNLESS, ESQUIRE, FPSC General
12 Counsel's Office, 2540 Shumard Oak Boulevard,
13 Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0850, appearing on behalf of
14 the Florida Public Service Commission.

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1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Well, good afternoon,
3 everybody. Welcome, and thank you all for
4 attending this customer service hearing. This is a
5 part of the review of the Florida Public Utility's
6 company request for a rate adjustment.

7 Today's service hearing is an important part
8 of the process and dedicated to hearing from you,
9 the customer. Thank you all for taking time in
10 your busy day to come out. Obviously, as we see a
11 number of attendees, obviously this is very
12 important to you in the community.

13 Let's go ahead and start with the notice.
14 Staff, would you mind please reading the notice?

15 MS. BROWNLESS: Thank you.

16 By notice issued on November 20th, 2024, this
17 time and place has been set for a customer service
18 hearing in Docket No. 20240099-EI. The purpose of
19 the customer service hearing is to give customers
20 and other interested persons an opportunity to
21 offer comments regarding the quality of service the
22 utility --

23 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Suzanne, I think your mic
24 might be off.

25 UNIDENDIFIED SPEAKER: Speak up.

1 MS. BROWNLESS: Do you want me to start over,
2 sir?

3 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Yeah. Sorry.

4 MS. BROWNLESS: The purpose of this customer
5 service hearing is to give customers and other
6 interested persons an opportunity to offer comments
7 regarding the quality of service the utility
8 provides, the proposed rate increase, and to
9 comment on any other relevant issues.

10 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Excellent. Thank you.

11 At this time, we will go ahead and take
12 appearance from counsel, starting with Florida
13 Public Utilities.

14 MS. KEATING: I am not sure this is on.

15 COMMISSIONER FAY: Hold it down.

16 MS. KEATING: I see it.

17 Good afternoon, Commissioners, everyone. I am
18 Beth Keating. I am with the Gunster Law Firm, and
19 I am here on behalf of Florida Public Utilities.

20 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Excellent. Thank you.

21 Office of Public Counsel.

22 MS. CHRISTENSEN: Good afternoon. Patty
23 Christensen with the Office of Public Counsel. And
24 with me today is Walt Trierweiler, the Public
25 Counsel.

1 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Excellent. Thank you.
2 Staff.

3 MS. BROWNLESS: Suzanne Brownless here on
4 behalf of the Florida Public Service Commission
5 staff.

6 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: All right. Excellent.
7 Thank you all for participating today and
8 sharing your experiences with the quality of
9 service that's being provided by FPUC. In addition
10 to sharing your comments here, you can also provide
11 written comments and additional material by paper,
12 mail or by email. The rate case overview, which
13 you may have seen when you walked in, will provide
14 instructions on how to provide written comments to
15 the Commission. Rest assured that your written
16 comments will be made available for us, as
17 Commissioners, to review.

18 If you have any specific billing issues from
19 FPUC, they are here to assist you. Eileen Cassidy,
20 I believe is here, right here waiving her hand. If
21 you have any questions, billing issues, or
22 something that may -- that you may need customer
23 service for, she's here to help you. Of course,
24 Commission staff is also present to answer any
25 general questions you may have about the rate case

1 or the rate case process.

2 So let's go ahead and move into opening
3 statements. We will hear from the customers, of
4 course. I would like to have just maybe brief
5 opening statements from the parties. Please maybe
6 limit your statements to just three minutes so we
7 can make sure that everyone gets enough time to
8 talk and share their comments, and we will start
9 with FPUC. Ms. Keating.

10 MS. KEATING: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I
11 would like to introduce Michelle Napier with the
12 company. She is the Director of Regulatory Affairs
13 for Florida Public Utilities.

14 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Excellent.

15 MS. NAPIER: Thank you, Mr. Commissioner and
16 Commissioners, for the opportunity to speak. And
17 thank you to our customers for participating this
18 afternoon.

19 As Beth said, I am Michelle Napier, the
20 Director of Regulatory Affairs Florida Public
21 Utilities and Chesapeake. I was hired by FPUC in
22 1976, and I have been with the company ever since.

23 As Mr. Chairman mentioned, we are here today
24 because FPUC has requested a base rate increase.
25 We made this request only after careful and

1 thoughtful deliberation, and because our current
2 rates do not sufficient -- are not -- are no longer
3 sufficient to allow us to continue to make the
4 investments necessary to ensure that we can
5 continue to provide safe and reliable service to
6 our customers.

7 We filed our last base rate case 11 years ago,
8 in 2014. Since then, we have made significant
9 capital investments, particularly associated with
10 reliability improvements and technology
11 improvements, like cybersecurity.

12 The company has, over the same period, faced
13 increased operating and maintenance costs, enhanced
14 -- increasing insurance costs and, like everyone
15 here today, inflation. We have also taken steps
16 over the years to try and control our costs, which
17 has helped in us delaying this request. And we
18 have continued over the years to try and address
19 other costs that impact our customers.

20 We have served this area for a long time, and
21 when Hurricane Michael hit this area hard, we were
22 here then. Like many of you, we have been working
23 to recover ever since. But one benefit of the
24 company being able to delay this request until now
25 is that the storm surcharge that you currently see

1 on your bill for Hurricane Michael recovery will
2 soon expire, which should mitigate any base rate
3 increase. Customers can actually expect to --
4 their total bill for this year to decrease from
5 last year because we have been able to reduce our
6 costs for generating electricity that we provide to
7 our customers.

8 We aren't perfect, but we strive to be. So
9 our commitment to you in this afternoon is to
10 listen, learn and respond to any service concerns
11 you may have. We are honored to be your electric
12 utility, and strive every day to fully understand
13 your energy needs so we can better serve you.

14 Now, we have already heard concerns raised in
15 other venues regarding office hours and being
16 present in the community, and you can rest assured
17 that we are taking that to heart. Please know our
18 main priority is to provide our customers with the
19 safe and reliable service they deserve.

20 Eileen Cassidy, from our customer care team,
21 is with us here today to ensure questions you have
22 regarding your bill or service can be addressed
23 quickly. Rhondon Gray, who lives right here in
24 Marianna is also with us, as well as David
25 Richardson, Mark Cutshaw and Mason Brock.

1 Thank you.

2 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Great. Thank you.

3 Let's go to the Office of Public Counsel.

4 MR. TRIERWEILER: All right. Before we start
5 our opening statement, I want to take a minute, as
6 Public Counsel, to orient you to what's going on
7 here and what your role is.

8 This is all pre-decisional. No decisions have
9 been made yet, and the Commission is here to hear
10 from you. We think it's important to show up in
11 communities and hear directly from the customers.

12 And what are they here to hear? They want to
13 hear how you think this rate case is going to
14 impact you, your family. If you have service
15 comments, good or bad, it's important that we hear
16 them, and it's important that the Commission hears
17 details.

18 No one likes the idea of paying more for
19 anything. That is a given. But the details that
20 you could provide are helpful.

21 And I want to thank you for being here. I
22 know that there are people who may be working or
23 just don't get out anymore, or can't get out
24 anymore. And you represent the customers in this
25 area, so it's really important that we get a chance

1 to hear from you.

2 I want you to remember the fact that your goal
3 here, whatever your purpose, and whatever you want
4 to say, is to influence and persuade the
5 Commission. So use your -- use your details, talk
6 about how it affects you. Talk about your
7 experiences.

8 Now, if it's repetitive, if Mrs. Smith just
9 said the same thing that you want to say, you can
10 endorse what she just said instead, but my personal
11 experience on top of that is this. And so that way
12 you can reinforce each other's comments in your
13 persuasive attempts to get your voice heard and to
14 have people react to your experiences and your
15 concerns about the rate case.

16 And once again, if you decide that you want to
17 speak and you haven't signed up, you know you can
18 always get the attention and you can sign up and we
19 will add you to the end. If you decide someone has
20 already said what you had to say and you want to
21 waive, you can certainly waive as well. It's all
22 up to you, but we really -- we all appreciate your
23 participation here today.

24 Thank you.

25 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: The good news is I didn't

1 start my three-minute clock.

2 MR. TRIERWEILER: Sorry about that. I was
3 freewheeling.

4 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Yeah, I know. I know. All
5 good.

6 Ms. Christensen, you are recognized.

7 MS. CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. Again, good
8 afternoon. My name is Patty Christensen with the
9 Office of Public Counsel.

10 Just to tell you a little bit about our
11 office. It was created by the Legislature to
12 represent you, the customers, in these cases before
13 the Commission.

14 As the Chairman and Mr. Trierweiler have
15 already discussed, as well as the company, we are
16 here today because Florida Public Utility, FPUC,
17 has filed a request to increase their base rates
18 using the Commission's Proposed Agency Action
19 process. In the PAA process, the Commission staff
20 reviews the utility's request, asks questions and
21 eventually writes a recommendation on the utility's
22 rate request for the Commissioners' consideration.
23 At this point in the PAA process, the Office of
24 Public Counsel monitors the case and reviews the
25 company's responses to the staff's data requests

1 and the staff's recommendation.

2 Based on the Commissioners' PAA decision, the
3 Public Counsel and OPC staff will make a
4 determination whether it is in the customers' best
5 interest to protest this PAA order, taking into
6 consideration multiple factors.

7 However, as has been said before, we are here
8 today to hear from you, the customers. The
9 testimony today will be sworn and under oath. We
10 ask that you address the quality of service you
11 have received from the company, the affordability
12 of the utility service, and any other issues you
13 wish the Commission to consider in its decision.
14 This is your opportunity to provide the Commission
15 with your true opinion, good, bad, about the
16 company and this rate increase.

17 Thank you.

18 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Excellent. Thank you. And
19 thank you for, obviously, for the overview.

20 So we are going to jump right in. You know, I
21 kind of failed to maybe explain who we are. Of
22 course, we are the Florida Public Service
23 Commission. To my right is Commissioner Fay, and
24 to my left is Commissioner Clark, and to his left
25 is Commissioner Passidomo Smith. Commissioner Art

1 Graham has joined us electrically, or has dialed
2 in, but he, of course, he can hear and see
3 everything that we are doing today. I am Mike La
4 Rosa, the Chairman currently of the Florida Public
5 Service Commission.

6 So we are going to jump in now to customer
7 testimony. Your comments will become part of the
8 official record, therefore, subject to
9 cross-examination; meaning, that you may be asked a
10 question by either of the parties, or maybe by one
11 of us as Commissioners. Don't be intimidated by
12 that process. It's just to make sure that we
13 clearly understand the comments that you might be
14 making.

15 If all guests who intend to testify, if you
16 don't mind just standing up and raising your right
17 hand. So if you have signed up to testify, or you
18 plan on speaking, if you can please stand up and
19 raise your right hand.

20 (Whereupon, Chairman La Rosa administered the
21 oath.)

22 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Awesome.

23 What we will do -- this is how the process
24 will work. The Office of Public Counsel will
25 helping us out today by calling out the individuals

1 who have spoken -- or have signed up to speak. If
2 you have not signed up, of course, I will open it
3 up at the end to allow anyone to come in later if
4 they haven't signed up officially.

5 I would like to keep the comments to about
6 five minutes. I am not going to be overly strict
7 on that, but, of course, I want to make sure all of
8 your neighbors here have the ability to provide
9 their comments, and then we will continue on as so.

10 So normally, I like to allow elected officials
11 to speak first. I know that we have at least two
12 elected officials. If we have any more, please
13 proceed after them. So I am going to go ahead and
14 start by calling up Commissioner Westbrook,
15 Chairman Westbrook?

16 COMMISSIONER WESTBROOK: Yes, sir.

17 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: If you don't mind please
18 addressing us, and we will allow you to start us
19 off.

20 COMMISSIONER WESTBROOK: Thank you for coming,
21 everyone of you. Special effort. We appreciate
22 it. Special effort for me as well.

23 I represent every person in here that's a
24 regular everyday person. I don't represent any of
25 companies or corporations, but I certainly would

1 like for you all not to raise the rates for Florida
2 Public Utilities. I can remember when I was a
3 little boy, our bill was about \$3 or \$4. I can't
4 remember that now.

5 When the storm came, my electric utilities was
6 the last one they turned back on -- 37 days, I
7 believe. I could look across the field and see
8 where West Florida electric had been on for about
9 25 days.

10 We can't call the office because the doors are
11 locked and we can't get in. No one can contest the
12 bill. I am sure there is plenty of rebuttals to
13 it. I understand. I was fortunate to serve on the
14 utilities committee and the Florida Legislature
15 before. That and a dollar will buy you a Coke most
16 anywhere you stop. But we have a lot of people
17 that can't afford the bill like it is, and, please
18 consider that.

19 Thank you.

20 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you.

21 COMMISSIONER WESTBROOK: Yes, sir.

22 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: All right. Next up is
23 Mr. Hunter Nolen, Jackson County Superintendent, I
24 believe. Mr. Nolen, you are recognized when you
25 are ready.

1 SUPERINTENDENT NOLEN: All right. Good
2 afternoon. Hunter Nolen, newly elected
3 superintendent of the Jackson County Schools.
4 Thank y'all for coming today. I greatly appreciate
5 it. Like my good friend, Mr. Westbrook said, I
6 represent everybody in this county's children. We
7 have 1,100 employees in our school system.

8 I had my ladies in finance run some numbers.
9 Last year alone, we spent \$1.7 million on power.
10 That's a lot of zeros. I am not a Facebook person.
11 I don't really get on-line a whole bunch. I try to
12 teach my son the same thing, so y'all remember
13 that, students. I have heard the rate may go up
14 10, 20, 30, some 44 percent. I did the math with
15 my ladies, and if we raise -- if you guys decide to
16 raise the rates on our power, 10 percent, it will
17 cost us \$165,000 extra; 15 percent, \$250,000. I
18 think that's a quarter of a million dollars.
19 20 percent, 30 percent, 40 percent, if you raise it
20 40 percent, \$700,000.

21 We are a small school district, 6,000
22 students, 1,100 employees. I can't give all of
23 them because I am going to go drive a bus this
24 afternoon because we are short on bus drivers, we
25 can't pay them enough right now.

1 I have some things, some ideas in my head that
2 I would like to put in place for this upcoming
3 school year. There are 67 counties in the state of
4 Florida. Currently, Jackson County rates 40th.
5 That's unacceptable to me. I have got some ideas,
6 I have got some plans. Raising the rate on our
7 power is going to greatly impact what I am able to
8 do with my team and with this community next year.
9 Love FPU. Love turning on that power. Love
10 turning on that computer. But it's going to
11 greatly impact how we educate our students next
12 year in Jackson County.

13 Thank you for your time.

14 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Excellent. Thank you,
15 congratulations on your election.

16 SUPERINTENDENT NOLEN: Thank you so much.

17 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Are there any other elected
18 officials? Yeah, please come on up and just
19 identify yourself.

20 SUPERINTENDENT PEDDIE: Yes, sir.

21 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: I don't have a card, you
22 are recognized when you are ready, sir.

23 SUPERINTENDENT PEDDIE: My name is Kyle
24 Peddie. I am the Superintendent in Liberty County.
25 I appreciate the opportunity to be here to speak in

1 front of you.

2 Just very quickly, as Mr. Nolen has said, we
3 are the poorest county in the state of Florida. We
4 usually vie with Lafayette County for that. We
5 have about 1,245 students. A lot of people don't
6 understand size and scope when you begin to tell
7 them about Liberty County, it's mind-blowing,
8 because that's the total amount of kids we have in
9 the whole district, 1,245.

10 We only have 96 teachers, and an 11 percent
11 increase in that, I will lose a teacher. That's
12 hard -- that's tough for us. We are adding voca --
13 we are really pushing vocational education, CTE,
14 and we are adding buildings, and, of course, we
15 just added a welding program, and we have got these
16 welders, and the meter is running so fast, we are
17 letting them double as ceiling fans to try to
18 consolidate coolness in there -- I am just kidding.
19 That's a job joke. But we are trying to live
20 within our means. And so I think that should apply
21 even to everybody here today.

22 As a school system, the stated says, you are
23 going to do this. You are going to keep a three
24 percent fund balance, unreserved fund balance, and
25 we -- you don't get -- you can't make excuses, and

1 you can't go to your people and raise taxes. We
2 are maxed out. We have to learn to live within our
3 means.

4 So I would -- I think there is probably a
5 compromise here, and I would offer that as, you
6 know, is there -- is there some kind of compromise
7 somewhere in between? Is there a number that fits
8 for everybody?

9 And No. 2, as Mr. Nolen said, where does this
10 stop? Is there -- should we anticipate more
11 increases, because for our budgeting, we start
12 budgeting, like, right now for the next school
13 year. So that -- it sure helps us in our planning,
14 but I appreciate -- appreciate y'all's consideration
15 to help a brother out.

16 Thank you.

17 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Excellent. Thank you.

18 All right. Any other elected officials? I am
19 not seeing any.

20 All right. So I am going to go turn the list
21 over to the Office of Public Counsel. If you don't
22 mind just go ahead and calling out maybe three
23 names at a time. So that means if you hear your
24 name, of course, second or third, just be ready to
25 be on deck to be able to come to the podium.

1 And then, parties, if there is any questions,
2 Commissioners, any questions, raise your hand just
3 to grab my attention, we will make sure to
4 interrupt or stop the person that is speaking to
5 make sure we ask any questions if you guys have
6 any.

7 Ms. Christensen, you are recognized to
8 announce the names.

9 MS. CHRISTENSEN: Okay. The first speaker
10 Antonio Diaz-Jimenez. The speaker after him,
11 Amanda Williams, and then the third speaker will be
12 Ilene Grier.

13 MR. DIAZ-JIMENEZ: I am going to pass on the
14 first one.

15 MS. CHRISTENSEN: Okay. Then I would ask for
16 Amanda Williams and then Ms. --

17 MS. WILLIAMS: I will pass too.

18 MS. CHRISTENSEN: Okay. Ms. Grier? And then
19 the next speaker would be Virginia Beard, and Anita
20 Helton.

21 MS. GRIER: Good afternoon, everyone. Hi, my
22 name is -- set my phone right there. My name is
23 Ilene Grier, and I am with the Salvation Army, and
24 I serve Jackson, Washington and Holmes County, and
25 my main job is to assist home people with their

1 utility bills.

2 So Jackson County is by far my -- my most
3 county that I serve. So firsthand, Jackson County
4 is the ones that -- that need the most help from
5 me. Most of them are on fixed incomes. So most of
6 them, their bills are always over \$400. Half of
7 their incomes are probably \$900 or less. So with a
8 bill of \$400, that's half of their income. They
9 pretty much can't do anything else.

10 You know, the way that they price their --
11 their kilowatts, it's like most stuff is the more
12 you use the less you pay, but not with power
13 companies. The first thousand kilowatts is a base
14 price. After the first thousand, it goes up. So
15 you could pay almost double for your second
16 thousand kilowatts once you pay after that first
17 thousand.

18 So I paid \$12,000 in four months at \$200 a
19 person in December. So, you know, it's crazy, you
20 know, that I -- you now, I pay for peoples
21 utilities, and it's just a never-ending -- it just
22 doesn't stop. They just can't -- they just can't
23 afford an increase. I see it every single day. My
24 phone never stops all day long. It doesn't stop.
25 People cannot afford an increase, especially here

1 in Jackson County. They just can't afford it.

2 And one other thing, I have bills here of
3 every single person that I did just a week ago,
4 just one week ago, and I see these numbers, I got a
5 paper from one of my clients that there is supposed
6 to be, I think it says .2373 in October. I don't
7 have one bill that has that number on there. The
8 interim rate, 0.2548 in November 1st, not one bill
9 has that number on there. Every one of them has
10 0.31. Every single one of them. I don't have any
11 bill that has any of these numbers proposed or not.
12 They are all higher. So I don't understand how it
13 works, but not one bill has any of these numbers.

14 So I don't know if it's -- if -- I don't know
15 if there is numbers that they subtract or add, but
16 I am telling you, out of nine bills that I have in
17 front of me, prior to October, they are not 23.
18 They are not 25. They are all 29 and 31. So I
19 don't know how that works, but with the numbers
20 higher, the bills are higher. So, I mean, I don't
21 know. It's just -- it's just -- I don't now if
22 they are overcharging. If they are, they can -- my
23 clients need refunds because, I mean, it's not
24 right. If they say they are supposed to be
25 charging .25 and they are charging .29, that's not

1 .25, so, you know.

2 So I would encourage you not to approve a rate
3 increase for Jackson County at all because they
4 cannot afford a rate increase.

5 Thank you.

6 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you.

7 Any questions, Office of Public Counsel, no?

8 MS. CHRISTENSEN: No, but I would ask if you
9 could maybe speak with the FPUC people after this
10 to go through those bills so that they can give
11 clarity on that.

12 MS. GRIER: Okay. Thank you.

13 MS. CHRISTENSEN: The next speaker would be
14 Virginia Beard, and then after her, Anita Helton
15 and Jon Mattock.

16 MS. BEARD: I am Virginia Beard, and I
17 appreciate so far what everyone has said, because
18 it's very heartfelt, I think, FOR everyone in this
19 room.

20 I have been only living here for two years
21 now. My family lived here for five generations. I
22 moved back to a farm community. I am involved with
23 a lot of farmers. We were here during the
24 hurricane. I manage different properties that have
25 people with Pivot, and things like that. Back in

1 October, when I get the bills for the Pivot on one
2 particular property, it showed it was turned off in
3 October, and the bills prior to that were \$900.
4 This month, in January, I got one for \$500 to \$600.
5 I don't understand, because the year's history
6 prior to that was 156 when it's totally turned off.
7 And we have not had Pivot since October.

8 So the other thing is there is a lot to
9 consider here, because listening to the news and
10 what rumors may take place, whether your Democrat
11 or Republican, I think we are all family. The
12 scarcity of what they spread around of even our gas
13 stoves, gas power not being available to us at some
14 point, but yet we are looking at a company that
15 wants to go up, you can say 44 percent, you might
16 as well say 50.

17 And this is me being in this area, I came from
18 Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, okay. This community
19 has been the best community I have lived in my
20 life. These are very humble, hard-working people,
21 and they don't have smart homes that are put
22 together, you know, as well as the next door
23 neighbor's or somebody else's, that's why these
24 bills are so high. But regardless, I stay on point
25 with we have got to stay. There is no reason,

1 unless you can specifically show why. Is there
2 another power company going up? Is there something
3 that we are doing, you know, you all as a
4 collective that you are going to build some huge
5 plant that's going to give an advantage to our
6 area? Otherwise, Jackson County can't -- can't do
7 it.

8 The hurricane that came through here -- I had
9 a house on Daniel Street, my family bed. We had
10 gas. Nobody else had gas. Nobody else within 10,
11 probably five houses all came to stay with us. I
12 had showers for them. We were able to boil water.
13 We had no electricity. I did six weeks, and this
14 is even one of the first roads for the hospital
15 that went through. But on Dan -- on my house, I
16 went six weeks using candles. Thank goodness my
17 mother was a horder.

18 But that's all I have. The people in this
19 community deserve better than this. And I think
20 there should be some huge consideration, and not
21 just what -- you know, we need to hear back, not
22 that we took this to everybody and a decision was
23 made, oh, well. We need to be kept in the loop if
24 we are brought to the table today.

25 Thank you.

1 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Commissioners, any
2 questions? Office of Public Counsel?

3 Great. Thank you for your testimony.

4 MS. CHRISTENSEN: The next speaker is Anita
5 Helton, followed bring John Mattock and Matthew
6 White.

7 MS. HELTON: Good afternoon. How are y'all
8 doing?

9 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Doing well, Ms. Helton.
10 How are you?

11 MS. HELTON: I am nervous. I am upset. I am
12 not liking this 40 percent increase.

13 I retired from the electric co-op in Metro
14 Atlanta. Never once did we have increases this
15 high. Never. Never. Shame on y'all. Shame. If
16 I could do deregulation today, I would go to
17 deregulation. And you know who I would go with,
18 West Florida Electric Co-Op. Shame on y'all.

19 This is a poverty level county, and you are
20 wanting to do it 40 percent. 40 percent. People
21 can't even afford groceries. Our parents can't
22 afford groceries. They can barely keep the lights
23 on. Shame. That's all I can say for y'all is
24 shame. I hope you sleep good at night.

25 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Commissioners, any

1 questions?

2 (Applause.)

3 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: All right. Seeing none.

4 Is it Mattock?

5 MR. MATTOCK: Yeah, Jon Mattock.

6 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: You are recognized, sir.

7 MR. MATTOCK: I am glad y'all showed up today.
8 My wife and I lived in Albuquerque, New Mexico
9 about three years ago. We sold everything we had,
10 and at that time, I was feeding all my kids and
11 grandkids, and everything, we had five different
12 households, so I was going to die taking care of
13 them.

14 So I retired from the military and we lived in
15 an RV for about a year looking for a house. We
16 came to sleepy Marianna, and I found a house over
17 by the pond. It ain't on the water because there
18 is too many damn mosquitoes, but it's close.

19 So my wife and I love this town. It's sleepy.
20 It's quiet. It's peaceful. The people are
21 friendly. They wave at us. All my neighbors come
22 out to the mailbox and we have nice discussions.
23 Some of them are working families. Most of them
24 are retired.

25 What I really like about them is Frank, who

1 lived a couple doors down, he lived to 102. He
2 just died last year. A hell of a nice guy. Jim's
3 mom, she lived to 103. She just died last year.
4 So I got pretty good odds of living a while. I
5 don't know what's in the water here.

6 But the reason I am up here is I am retired
7 Air Force. I did 23 years serving my country. So
8 that I could experience my golden years. My wife
9 has always wanted to live down near Florida, not
10 right near the ocean, but close enough where she
11 can go get her feet wet whenever she wants, so
12 that's what we do. We got a couple of dogs, got a
13 lot of company that comes and visits.

14 My lowest utility bill, I called her, she
15 texted it to me, is \$165 for a month. Okay.
16 That's hell of a lot cheaper than New Mexico was,
17 where I lived up in the mountains. The high ones
18 get up pushing 400, depending on how long I got to
19 have that air conditioner on, or how much I got to
20 turn the heat up. Well, I tell you right now, we
21 use blankets. We sit there at night and watch TV,
22 and she's got a blanket over her on the couch, I
23 got a blanket on me, and that's so that we can
24 afford our utility bill right now, okay.

25 One more comment. I mean, you have heard it

1 enough times, the resounding thing is here, that
2 sounds pretty damn expensive, 44 percent.

3 One more comment would be the reason I left
4 Albuquerque is because every corner had homeless
5 people on it begging for my money. And, you know,
6 for a while, I gave them a dollar. I would give
7 them a bottle of water, or if I had an extra
8 hamburger or something, whatever, I would give it
9 to them. We don't have that problem here yet. Not
10 yet. There is a couple of them hanging out over
11 near Walmart. Shame on them. I know where the
12 hell they live, because I followed them.

13 If you guys raise this, you are going to raise
14 a lot more than utilities. You are going to raise
15 a lot of problems in this town. I just left them.
16 Please think this through.

17 Thank you.

18 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you for your service
19 to this country.

20 (Applause.)

21 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Any questions,
22 Commissioners?

23 All right, seeing none, let's move to Mr.
24 Dean.

25 MS. CHRISTENSEN: Matthew White.

1 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Oh, sorry.

2 MS. CHRISTENSEN: Matthew White and then
3 followed by Mr. Dean.

4 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Sorry about that.

5 Mr. White, you are recognized.

6 MR. WHITE: Good afternoon. My name is
7 Matthew White, Associate Vice-President at Chipola
8 College, speaking today on behalf of the college.
9 Our college serves a five-county district,
10 Jackson, Washington, Holmes, Calhoun and Liberty.
11 And as you already heard from Jackson and Liberty,
12 the superintendents here today, we support their
13 comments.

14 First I would like to start by thanking FPU
15 for their partnership with Chipola College, any
16 service need that we have had has been handled
17 exceptionally and critically, and so we appreciate
18 that.

19 We had an increased electrical service need
20 for our welding program, and that was handled
21 quickly and got us what we needed, so that was
22 great. They are also partners with our new
23 electricity program that we started in August, so
24 we appreciate that partnership.

25 Speaking towards the rate increases, while

1 there has not been a rate increase since 2014, and
2 it's my understanding that there have been rate
3 increases yearly since 2014 as allowed under the
4 annual adjustments to cost recovery rates as
5 determined in accordance with the formulas and
6 procedures specified by the Florida Public Service
7 Commission. This is language that's on the FPU
8 website for the '24 to '25 rate changes.

9 The current proposed base rate increase,
10 combined with these ongoing adjustments, creates
11 significant budgetary challenges for our
12 institution. For a public college operating on a
13 fixed budget, these funds would otherwise support
14 student services, academic programs, as well as
15 maintaining affordable tuition rates.

16 On behalf of the college, I ask the Commission
17 to consider the broader educational impacts of the
18 rate increases on public institutions. A phased
19 implementation approach would allow for better
20 absorption and planning for the increased
21 operational cost.

22 Thank you for allowing me to speak today, and
23 if anybody has any questions.

24 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you.

25 Commissioners, any questions?

1 Thank you for your testimony. Appreciate it.

2 MR. WHITE: Thank you.

3 MS. CHRISTENSEN: The next speaker is Mr. Jim
4 Dean, followed by Sid Riley and Lavon Pope.

5 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Mr. Dean, you are
6 recognized, sir.

7 MR. DEAN: I am glad I am before Sid Riley.

8 First of all, I want to thank the ladies and
9 gentlemen that work for Florida Public Utilities.
10 Over the years, I have gotten to know them well,
11 and they do a fantastic job for our community, and
12 the ladies and gentlemen are an asset to our
13 community, so thank you very much for your service
14 in our community.

15 I am not an expert in electric rate setting,
16 nor have I been able to read the 300 plus pages of
17 this entire rate study, or case. I am concerned
18 about the negative impact this increase is going to
19 have on our communities. The notice mailed out to
20 our homes states that FPU's last rate case was
21 conducted in 2014. Although, this is only one
22 aspect of the rate, it is a very good comment.

23 The following comments were provided in an
24 effort to limit or reduce -- my comments are
25 provided to limit or reduce or eliminate the

1 potential rate increase. In the flier that the
2 Florida Public Service Commission put out the rate
3 case overview published by the Florida Public
4 Service Commission on page three, it indicates that
5 a thousand kilowatt hours as of 8/1/2024, the base
6 rate was \$40.68, the fuel charge 102.59, and other
7 charges, which includes the storm recovery charge
8 \$18.56. The proposed rate is, the base rate, it
9 would be \$58.59, a 44-percent increase. The fuel
10 charge, believe it or not, goes down 27 percent.
11 But the other charges, which does include the storm
12 recovery charge, goes up 29 percent. This not only
13 impacts our families directly, but it also impacts
14 our family indirectly.

15 As an example, you know, the cities and other
16 public facilities like schools, and things of that
17 nature, we have street lighting in our community.
18 Well, that street lighting is the rates when you
19 look through, it indicates that there will be a
20 significant increase in that rate. Well, that rate
21 is going to impact all of the citizens of Marianna
22 and every other city I has streetlights in their
23 community where that electricity is provided by
24 Florida Public Utilities, they will have to
25 increase the taxes in order to pay those bills.

1 FPU noticed to the customers again that was
2 sent out to our families, points out that the last
3 rate case was 2014, and since that time, FPU has
4 made significant capital expenditures, particularly
5 associated with reliability improvements, and has
6 faced increased operating and maintenance costs
7 associated to a significant degree with customer
8 service improvements, system improvements and
9 enhanced reliability, and so on.

10 For five years or more, FPU has been
11 collecting storm recovery charges from the citizens
12 of Marianna and throughout Jackson, Calhoun and
13 Liberty Counties per 100 -- per 1,000 kilowatt
14 hour, to pay for the reconstruction of almost the
15 entire distribution system for Florida Public
16 Utilities. I don't know the exact percentage of
17 the system that has been rebuilt, but I know that
18 it was significant, because every tree in the City
19 of Marianna was down after the hurricane, along
20 with most every power pole in Marianna. And this
21 was all as a result of Hurricane Michael. How can
22 maintenance be significantly increased on a nearly
23 brand new distribution system?

24 Regarding customer service improvements, how
25 can you make significant improvements to help

1 customers when you closed the only public access
2 point, which is the office on Penn Avenue? There
3 is no personal contact with the general public as a
4 result of FPU closing the office on Penn Avenue.

5 As a child of parents, elderly parents that
6 live here in the City of Marianna, my parents are
7 86 and 88 years old, you know, I have had to take
8 on more responsibility for them. And there is no
9 way in torment that my mom could go -- could get on
10 a computer, much less figure out how to communicate
11 with somebody as it relates to her utility bill,
12 and they want to remain independent, and live
13 independently.

14 Some of my general comments and observations.
15 Hurricane Michael devastated our community.
16 Florida Public Utility has been able to reconstruct
17 most all of its distribution system as a result,
18 and has enabled them to build a better system with
19 the over \$12 per thousand kilowatt hour storm
20 recovery charge. What has been done to harden
21 these systems when they built them back?

22 You know, I have not heard anything about
23 undergrounding, especially whenever it comes to the
24 service of our hospitals, our schools, and things
25 of that nature. It looks like we would have done

1 something to harden those systems so that we might
2 -- we wouldn't face this again in the future.

3 There is numerous streetlights, like I
4 mentioned before, in the city. Why are there not
5 systems or processes available to the public to
6 report these outages? Or much less, why hasn't
7 been there been a monitoring program set up by
8 Florida Public Utilities?

9 Why do cities pay a flat wait rate for street
10 lighting when some of the lights apparently are
11 energy efficient and they cut off for a period of
12 time and then come back on, but we are still paying
13 and the cities, and the citizens are paying a flat
14 rate to have those lights along the roadways?

15 If we are greatly concerned about the customer
16 service, why -- again, why did we close the Penn
17 Avenue office?

18 The other thing that concerns me is the rate
19 case. Again, I have not read the entire thing, and
20 I don't plan to read the entire thing, but, you
21 know, there -- a lot of citizens in the counties
22 that FPU serves, Jacksonville, Calhoun and Liberty,
23 have invested significant amount of money in solar
24 energy to offset some of these high bills, you
25 know. And I know that the City of Marianna has

1 made a huge investment in solar energy. What
2 impact is this going to have on net metering? Is
3 this an opportunity to change the net metering
4 process so that, you know, there is not the ability
5 to reduce rates? I don't know, and I am not going
6 to read it in that much detail. You know, what is
7 that impact to the -- or is there a change in the
8 net metering?

9 Based on the FPU -- based on the Florida
10 Public Service Commission website, FPU has the
11 highest rates for an investor-owned utility in the
12 state of Florida. The proposed rate ensures that
13 the return on investment is 11.3 percent. You
14 know, my retirement fund doesn't generate 11
15 percent. It doesn't even generate half of that.
16 So, you know, this rate is to ensure that we allow
17 a return on investment of 11.3 percent. That seems
18 excessive to me.

19 Jackson, Calhoun and Liberty, and the
20 superintendent for Liberty County just mentioned
21 it, has some of the highest poverty rates in the
22 entire state of Florida, you know, but we are
23 talking about -- and I am not sure what the
24 increase is. I don't care if it's two percent,
25 it's still going to be -- have a huge impact on our

1 fixed income families.

2 We are asking the Florida Public Service
3 Commission to consider either deny the rate
4 increase, or at least reducing it significantly so
5 that our families, our children, and everyone else
6 can live here without worrying about where their
7 next meal is going to come from.

8 Thank you for your time, and have a great
9 afternoon.

10 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you.

11 Commissioners, any questions?

12 (Applause.)

13 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you for your
14 testimony.

15 MR. TRIERWEILER: Mr. Riley.

16 MR. RILEY: Good afternoon, Commissioners. I
17 rise in protest to the proposed rate increase for
18 Florida Public Utilities. I represent myself and
19 my family, and many other concerned Jackson County
20 citizens.

21 My name is Sid Riley. I have lived here for
22 55 of my 86 years. And during that time, I have
23 been a property owner, homeowner, taxpayer and
24 businessman, job creator and employer of
25 significant importance.

1 I want to examine the situation that's before
2 us first by looking at the victims. The victims
3 are the citizens of Marianna and the service area.

4 First of all, the charges that the City talks
5 about with the lights and the schooling system
6 talks about of their expenses won't be paid by
7 them, they will be paid by the taxpayers. They
8 will just continue to increase the taxes, and it
9 will come down to your consumers that are using the
10 power in their home.

11 Here's some of the demographics for Marianna:
12 20 percent of the population is over 65, and
13 probably on fixed incomes. The per capita income
14 is \$18,500. The U.S. average is \$41,200. So we
15 are about a third of the U.S. average per capita.

16 The household income average for Marianna is
17 \$27,294, and the U.S. average is \$78,199. So we
18 are less, but we are about a third of what the
19 national average is.

20 Liberty County, Jackson County and the service
21 area for Florida Public Utilities is the most
22 depressed, poorest area of Florida, and we are
23 suffering already a heavy burden. We are burdened
24 with rates that are among the highest in the state.
25 We are 6.8 percent above the state average, and we

1 are 22 percent above the national average. I can't
2 understand why it costs 22 percent more to generate
3 electricity in Florida than it does in the rest of
4 the country. There is money going someplace.

5 So the families here are struggling. We were
6 struck with a Category 5 hurricane, Michael, six
7 years ago, and the scars of that storm still remain
8 obvious in the downtown area, in the towns, and in
9 our forestry. There is other scars you can't see,
10 and that's in the pocketbooks of the people that
11 lost their life savings, and lost their homes
12 because of that storm. There are people who didn't
13 get a fee for storm damage, they had to pay the
14 fee, even though they were suffering even more than
15 the utility was. This area should have been exempt
16 from those charges, but we weren't, and we aren't.

17 The second thing we need to look at is the
18 benefactor of this increase. We can't really look
19 at Florida Public Utilities, because clever
20 accountants can move expenses and charges and fees
21 back and forth between totally held subsidiaries.
22 So we have to look at the mother ship, which is
23 Chesapeake indus -- Utilities. They recently
24 closed our Penn Avenue office, and I am sure that
25 when the utilities buy their transformers, and

1 their wire, and their equipment, they demand 30 to
2 45 days bill -- pay -- billing on it. Well, they
3 give us -- traditionally have given us 15 days.
4 But then when they made it where you can no longer
5 drop the payment in the box in front of the Penn
6 Avenue office on the night before your bill is due
7 and enjoy the 14 to 15 days, they closed it and
8 took away the box, and now people have to rely on
9 the U.S. Postal Service or bank transfers to move
10 the money from here to Philadelphia. And to do
11 that, you shorten the payment time by about four
12 days. Now, this enhanced FPU's cash flow, but it
13 worsened the cash flow for the consumer, and
14 certainly the service aspect of it is also a
15 serious concern.

16 Chesapeake Utilities is enjoying 14.8 percent
17 profits. This year, they are on track to repeat
18 that. That was the 19 -- 2023 figure. They
19 generate about \$20 million a quarter in profits.
20 Their stock reached an all-time high on the stock
21 market in November of last year, and it's still a
22 very high rate.

23 So I looked at who owns Chesapeake Utilities.
24 Do you know who owns Chesapeake Utilities? It is
25 86 percent owned by the hedge funds on the stock

1 market in New York. The largest stockholder of
2 Chesapeake Utilities is BlackRock, which is the
3 most notorious, most ruthless hedge fund in the
4 world. They control \$10.2 trillion of revenue, and
5 can manipulate the stock market as they wish. Now,
6 they are the largest owner of Chesapeake, which
7 totally owns Florida Public Utilities.

8 Then let's look at the regulators, the Public
9 Service Commission. Created in 1887 as a railroad
10 commission, and the members, the five members of
11 the Commission are paid around in excess of
12 \$150,000 a year to listen to customer complaints
13 and to make determinations about the needs of the
14 utilities. The Commission, unfortunately, has a
15 history of corruption. There have been many
16 instances of illegal and improper communications
17 between Commissioners and utility officials,
18 executives, between staff of the Florida Public
19 Service Commission and the utilities.

20 There is one instance of where the Chairman
21 was taken to the Kentucky Derby by the top
22 executive of Florida Power, and he came home with
23 much more money than he went to Kentucky with. I
24 guess he was very lucky.

25 There were instances of a long list of

1 Commissioners and staff members who, after they
2 served their term on the Commission, if they played
3 the game as you are supposed to, ended up with a
4 lucrative executive position with one of the
5 utilities; or if they had a law firm, that the law
6 firm enjoyed the high paying utility as a client.
7 These cases are all well-documented and known.

8 There are very few instances of a rate
9 increase being denied. One of the few instances
10 that I know of was the story of Nancy Argenziano,
11 who was a state senator, and became -- was
12 nominated for the committee by the nominating
13 council, and became a commissioner, and then was
14 elected chairman.

15 Nancy was a little bit of a hellion, and she
16 led the charge among the commissioners to deny
17 Florida Public Util -- well, Florida Power a rate
18 increase. And because she refused to play the
19 game, and the rate was denied, the next year, she
20 wasn't included in the nominating committee. And
21 not only did she lose her chairmanship, she lost
22 her commission position. So that was to be a
23 lesson for all future commissioners and chairs.

24 So I think what we see is one of the largest
25 financial institutions in the world giving pressure

1 on the Board of Directors of Chesapeake Utilities
2 to make their stock look as good as possible to
3 increase their revenue and make the stock perform
4 on the stock market so their investments pay off.
5 And then in response to that pressure, they tell
6 the leaders of Florida Public Utilities to go and
7 ask for a rate increase, and it doesn't --

8 So what we have is the powerful financial
9 institutions in New York squeezing the last drop of
10 blood from a depressed community in north Florida.
11 And the decision is going to rest on your
12 shoulders. And you can play the game and side with
13 the utilities and hope to get your reward at the
14 end of your term, or you can do what's right, what
15 you know in your heart should be done, and deny the
16 increase. The decision remains between you, your
17 conscious and your God.

18 Thank you.

19 (Applause.)

20 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you.

21 Commissioners, any of questions for Mr. Riley?

22 All right. Seeing none, I am not sure who we
23 have next.

24 MR. TRIERWEILER: Next, we have on Lavon Pope.

25 And following Ms. Pope is Michael Kilts.

1 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Ma'am, you are recognized.

2 MS. POPE: My name is Lavon Pope.

3 Mr. Sid is right, corporate greed seeks to
4 take over. But let me get to my statement and my
5 mission here this afternoon.

6 In reading your topic here, Florida Public
7 Service Commission rate increase overview, I want
8 to read number one: Why is FPUC requesting a rate
9 increase? FPUC is requesting a rate increase to
10 recover the costs of operating the utility and
11 allow FPUC an opportunity to earn a fair rate of
12 return on its investments.

13 That's the same goal that I have as well. I
14 have been living at my residence over 40 years.
15 The power pole that was there was there before I
16 got there 40 years ago. It's a rusty transformer.
17 The pole, every day, or every week, or when it
18 rains, it splinters. I have to go out there and
19 pick it up and burn the little splinters that are
20 coming off. My neighbor's is leaning to the point
21 it looks like, and we have discussed it, it's going
22 to fall over in the road.

23 So I say this to say that the last time I was
24 here, the discussion was, we are going to look into
25 the infrastructure. That's a part of this

1 increase. Well, if that was the case, I should
2 have a pole, and I am afraid that transformer is
3 going to catch on fire it's so rusty and burn my
4 house down.

5 So you tell us this, that you are doing all of
6 these increases to improve, but my infrastructure I
7 haven't seen any on my street. I haven't seen that
8 much around town either. So I am not sure why we
9 keep coming here and doing the same thing, and
10 saying the same thing.

11 And what really upsets me is that the Florida
12 Public Service Commission doesn't seem to take into
13 account that I am a widow for over 17 years, and I
14 am sure there is other stories out there, seniors
15 that are widows, our community has a lot of
16 devastation from the storm. But when all is said
17 and done, and you go back to your offices, and you
18 sit there and the power company seems to get the
19 leniency, and I am basically really tired of that.
20 What about us? We are not getting the service that
21 has been promised for from the last increase. I
22 haven't seen mine.

23 My bill for Thanksgiving month, I almost
24 gaped because I couldn't figure out. I called my
25 son, what is going on? But then I had the

1 paperwork and I briefly went through it. So when I
2 saw that this was coming up, I said, well, I will
3 give it another shot and I will give it another
4 try.

5 But I have been on this rodeo over and over
6 again, and it's the same results for us. When are
7 the people of Jackson County going to get a relief?
8 I mean, this is rough on us. But like I said, it's
9 your conscious. It's your God. But I am saying to
10 you, I haven't gotten a return that I expected.
11 Nobody else, I feel, is getting the return that
12 they are expecting from the last increase. So why
13 should the Commission consider fulfilling this
14 increase until y'all go back to the board, figure
15 out where you overspending, figure out whose salary
16 needs to not be getting an increase because they
17 have been constantly getting the increases and we,
18 our salaries have not, and figure it out within
19 your own house, Florida Public Utilities, because
20 that's what we have to do, and stop bringing it to
21 us and putting the burden on the people that we
22 can't afford to keep taking and putting on. And I
23 thank you for your time.

24 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Real quick, quick question.

25 (Applause.)

1 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: The infrastructure concerns
2 you have, is that at the address you have listed
3 here?

4 MS. POPE: Yes.

5 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Excellent. Great. Thank
6 you.

7 Commissioners, any other questions?

8 Okay. Seeing none -- if you don't mind, any
9 time there is clapping and there is discussion back
10 and forth, it gets missed on the court reporter.
11 So this young lady here is typing as fast as she
12 possibly can, so just -- if we can try to keep the
13 clapping down to a minimum.

14 So thank you. Then we will go back over to
15 OPC for the next person.

16 MR. TRIERWEILER: Michael Kilts, and then on
17 deck we have, it's very faint, Leigh.

18 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Beaulieu.

19 MR. TRIERWEILER: Beaulieu, thank you.

20 CHAIRMAN CLARK: Sir, you are recognized.

21 MR. KILTS: Hello. Michael Kilts with the
22 Jackson County School Board, I am Director of
23 Federal Program, School Improvement, Food Service
24 and Chief Negotiator, so I am here on several
25 points. I am just going to provide the dates --

1 some data for you to understand the community in
2 which is being served.

3 63 percent, or 3,717 of our students receive
4 direct federal assistance. So they are below the
5 poverty line. This high rate makes 94 percent of
6 our students, or 5,546 of them, eligible for free
7 lunch. And because that number is so high, the
8 federal government rounded up, and everybody eats
9 free in this county.

10 We support 315 students who are identified as
11 homeless under the McKinney-Vento Homeless
12 Education Act. That number tripled after Hurricane
13 Michael. We were serving around 100. Now we serve
14 around 300 every year.

15 As a chief negotiator tasked with the district
16 to support raises for our staff, the rate increase
17 proposed by FPU exceeds the amount of money we
18 provided as raises to 1,100 people last school
19 year.

20 Thank you.

21 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you.

22 Commissioners, any questions?

23 Seeing none.

24 MS. BEAULIEU: Hi. My name is Leigh Beaulieu.

25 I have lived here since -- I was born here. I am a

1 small business owner here in town, and I have a
2 business that's been running for probably four
3 years now. And the City has come along, and they
4 are trying to do Main Street Marianna, and they are
5 wanting to move businesses downtown. And if you do
6 this, I won't be able to move downtown.

7 I don't know what would happen to my business
8 as we move forward with this rate increase, because
9 it will hurt me, but it will hurt my customers
10 more. And I don't see how they can afford to come
11 and buy from us, and also if I have the opportunity
12 to move downtown with the grants that they have,
13 how am I going to be able to do it when I don't
14 know where my customer base is going to come from,
15 because they are not going to be able to afford it?

16 So as I am coming here today, I ask, please,
17 don't put this burden on us. Don't. My customers
18 can't afford it. So thank you so much.

19 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Great. Thank you.

20 Commissioners, any questions?

21 Seeing none.

22 MR. TRIERWEILER: We have Steve Dani, is that
23 correct? And William Lang on deck.

24 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Mr. Danny, you are
25 recognized, when you are ready, sir.

1 MR. DANI: Good afternoon. I am Steve Dani.

2 First, I don't know where y'all come from in
3 the state of Florida, or even in the country, so
4 what I have here are copies of my electric bill. I
5 am going to pass them off for you to run, I would
6 like you to take a quick look at them, pass them to
7 the middle, please.

8 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Office of Public Counsel,
9 do you want to enter these as exhibits?

10 MS. CHRISTENSEN: Yes, with the identifying
11 information redacted, if we could.

12 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Okay. We will handle that.

13 MR. DANI: Okay. The reason I am passing
14 these around, I don't know if you are familiar with
15 the local FPU paper bill, there is no information
16 on it, per se. Where is the history over the
17 preceding months for, let's say 12 months? It's
18 never been added to that bill. I have been paying
19 utility bills for 40 years through four different
20 states, I have never seen such a limited
21 information bill provided from a utility customer
22 to the customer, from the company to the customer.
23 Okay, there is just no look-back.

24 You look on the back of that information that
25 they are printing as a legend on what their bill is

1 charging you on the other side, and the information
2 itself isn't even copesetic. So I realize that's
3 not directly related to the rate increase, but yet,
4 it's how they conduct business and their services
5 here in Florida.

6 So I have kind of got two comments kind of
7 polar opposites of one another when it comes to
8 Florida Public Utilities' rates increase.

9 First I would like to say, deny any increase.
10 All right. FPU is a subordinate company to
11 Chesapeake Utilities Corporation. There has been
12 no growth with FPU here in Florida, along with poor
13 to nonexistent customer service along with a
14 walk-in business center on Penn Avenue being
15 closed. So I realize that's been mentioned several
16 times. That being said, don't give them any
17 increase. Why take money from Floridians and send
18 it north to support the Chesapeake Bay company?

19 Okay. Question for the Commission: When FPU
20 originally got the charter here in Florida, are
21 they following what that charter was told or
22 dictated to for them to conduct business in
23 Florida, or has that been redacted or amended since
24 their charter was given to them?

25 I am wondering if is there an ability to bring

1 in a different electric provider to Jackson County,
2 or some of the municipalities that are covered
3 under FPU? We have more regionally based companies
4 that could definitely be more beneficial to
5 Floridians.

6 My second comment, it's kind of a polar
7 opposite, it's the reality is the public
8 commissioners here, the company has asked for an
9 increase, it's very unlikely that you will say no.
10 You are going to give them something. But if their
11 increase must be granted and approved, I ask the
12 Commission to place certain contingencies on the
13 entire rate increase to include the following: All
14 the revenues from this increase being collected
15 must remain 100 percent in the state of Florida,
16 and can only be used for current infrastructure
17 improvements within the areas it is collected from.
18 These are -- monies may also include improving
19 customer service, walk-in centers that are
20 currently permanently closed in Florida.

21 In closing, I would like to thank some of the
22 speakers that stepped forward here, because there
23 has been a wealth of good information that they are
24 bringing forward to the Commission, and I thank
25 them for what they are doing.

1 Thank you.

2 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Can I ask you a quick
3 question? So on your bill, if I understood, your
4 point was transparency, right? There needs to be
5 more transparency in the bill, right?

6 MR. DANI: You see it right there.

7 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: I did, yes. So what
8 specifically would you like to see on the bill?
9 This is kind of maybe one of the first times I have
10 heard comments --

11 MR. DANI: Well, I guess as a reasonable
12 adult, I think we probably all pay utilities here,
13 when have you ever seen a company not produce the
14 current, like, 12 months history of the usage for
15 whatever you have been doing at that account?
16 There is nothing here, okay. You pay the
17 utility --

18 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: No. No. I get it. I get
19 where you are going with it. I was kind of --

20 (Multiple speakers.)

21 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: -- use your point.

22 MR. DANI: And like I said, you look at the
23 information that they provide in the back of the
24 bill that's supposed to explain the front of the
25 bill, and I don't know the last time it was

1 updated, but it's vague and lacks, for lack of a
2 better terminology, any transparency on what's
3 going on on the billing side.

4 Thank you.

5 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Awesome.

6 Commissioners, any other questions?

7 Commissioner Fay has got a question.

8 MR. DANI: Yes, sir.

9 COMMISSIONER FAY: Just a quick follow-up.

10 You mentioned that the bill itself isn't
11 related to the rate case. It is. We are here to
12 hear from customers about what they believe should
13 be done or should not be done related to the
14 utility. So don't hesitate to imply that it
15 doesn't. It does relate to the rate case, so I
16 appreciate you bringing it forward.

17 MR. DANI: Thank you, Commissioner Fay.

18 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Awesome. Thank you for
19 your testimony.

20 MR. DANI: I am going to collect -- oh, you
21 are going to hang on to them?

22 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: I got to see where it is.

23 COMMISSIONER FAY: Do you have a copy?

24 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: So what I believe we will
25 do, staff, I am assuming is going to make copies of

1 it and --

2 MS. BROWNLESS: We need a copy of the bill for
3 the purposes of the record.

4 MR. DANI: Thank you so much.

5 MR. TRIERWEILER: There is two months bills.
6 It looks like he has already redacted the personal
7 information from it, so we should be able to --

8 MS. CHRISTENSEN: Put it in the record.

9 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Find a way to get it into
10 the record, we will see if there is any --

11 MS. BROWNLESS: Yes. We would like to
12 identify that as Exhibit No. 1 for the purpose of
13 this hearing.

14 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Is there objection to that?

15 MS. BROWNLESS: Is there any objection?

16 MS. KEATING: No.

17 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Okay.

18 MS. BROWNLESS: Ms. Keating, have you been
19 able to see it?

20 MS. KEATING: We have.

21 MS. BROWNLESS: Okay. And do you have any
22 objection to it being entered into the record?

23 MS. KEATING: No objection.

24 MS. BROWNLESS: Thank you.

25 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: And we need -- just for the

1 record, we need to hold on to this?

2 MS. BROWNLESS: Yes.

3 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Great. Thank you.

4 MS. BROWNLESS: And you need to acknowledge
5 that it's been entered into the record.

6 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: All right. And so show it
7 entered into the record. Thank you.

8 MS. BROWNLESS: Thank you it.

9 (Whereupon, Exhibit No. 1 was marked for
10 identification and received into evidence.)

11 MR. TRIERWEILER: Next we have William Lang
12 and Rex Torbett on deck.

13 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Mr. Lang, you are
14 recognized, sir, when you are ready. Oh, it's
15 Long. I'm sorry.

16 MR. TRIERWEILER: Is it Long?

17 MR. LONG: Sorry you couldn't read my
18 penmanship there, but good afternoon. I am William
19 Long. I am the city manager here for the City of
20 Marianna. Let me say first, we appreciate you
21 coming and giving us the opportunity to speak on
22 this issue, and it's a substantial issue.

23 Right out of the gate, let me say that the
24 City of Marianna enjoys a uniquely good
25 relationship with our local public utility, Florida

1 Public Utilities. We work with them. They work
2 with us. We need know them. They know us, first
3 name basis, and have for a lot, a lot of years, and
4 so we are extremely proud of what they provide on a
5 daily regular base. We are extremely proud of how
6 responsive they are to us when we call, when we
7 have a problem. So again, we enjoy a very good
8 relationship with Florida Public Utilities and all
9 of the individuals who represent that company.

10 We are a significant customer of Florida
11 Public Utilities. Some probably half million
12 dollars or so each year in utility payments to
13 Florida Public Utilities for the buildings, the
14 operations that we operate here in the City, some
15 \$20,000 a month of is that is for streetlights
16 alone, and so we understand the cost of providing
17 the utility, the City is a provider of utilities
18 itself, and so we understand it costs. We
19 understand there is a cost associated with
20 providing a utility to its customers.

21 I only would ask that you consider the impact,
22 that you consider the impact that it would have on
23 small cities, small municipalities. The City lives
24 on a budget, just like most everybody else. The
25 school board, my good friend Hunter Nolen in the

1 back, who spoke earlier, the gentleman from Liberty
2 County, cities, school boards, small counties, we
3 all live on a budget, and so if there is a
4 substantial increase to that half million dollars
5 or so that we spend each year in payments to
6 Florida Public, somehow, some way, we have got to
7 figure that out.

8 That's not always easy. I hear from people
9 all the time who think that the cities are loaded
10 with money. They think that the counties are
11 loaded with money. And the reality is, that's just
12 not so.

13 So again, what I would ask is that you would
14 just really consider the impact on cities, on city
15 budgets, on city governments, on county
16 governments, on school boards, because in lots of
17 instances, that means the loss of a teacher. That
18 means a utility worker that we are not able to keep
19 on. It means that we are not able to pass on
20 raises sometimes to our valuable employees. So
21 again, what I would ask is that you would consider
22 the impact going forward.

23 Beyond that, and on behalf of some of our
24 citizens here in the City of Marianna, this is a
25 economically deprived county, economically deprived

1 city. And many of the individuals who will be
2 affected by the proposed increase are the
3 individuals who can least afford to take on the
4 increase. Many of our citizens, through no fault
5 of their own, or through whatever, however it
6 happens, live in houses that are not the most well
7 insulated, they live in homes that don't have the
8 most efficient HVAC systems, HVAC units in their
9 homes and so they suffer, they suffer tremendously.

10 And so my mother, 91 years old, lives in the
11 house that I grew up in since I was 14 years old,
12 and I help her pay her utility bill every month. I
13 own now the house that she lives in, and I help her
14 with her bills every month. And so if there is an
15 increase a half mile down the road, I am going to
16 feel it. I am going to feel it twice.

17 And so I would again just ask you to consider
18 the impact that it will have on small cities, small
19 counties, small municipalities, and the individuals
20 who are economically not able to take on an
21 increase. And in this community, in this community
22 there are lots of those individuals.

23 Thank you very much.

24 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you.

25 Commissioners, questions?

1 Thank you very much.

2 MR. TORBETT: Good afternoon. My name is Rex
3 Torbett. I am -- I wear several hats, but the
4 first hat I wear is for Jackson Hospital.

5 We are a special taxings district here in
6 Jackson County. Our service area is mostly Jackson
7 County, some parts of the west part of the county
8 we don't cover. An increase -- let me ditto what
9 William said about our partnership with FPU. They
10 have been great. Our service is good. They work
11 with us. Several of the guys that work there are
12 my personal friends. So we love and enjoy a great
13 relationship.

14 We are in the process of a future plan for a
15 45,000-square-foot medical office building, to
16 include a surgery center and an imaging center. We
17 are also in the process of the plans for a
18 10,000-square-foot physical therapy building on a
19 recently acquired elementary school that we took
20 over. An increase in the utilities might
21 significantly impact those business lines that we
22 have, because the hospital pays about \$1.2 million
23 currently for electricity bills. If we see this
24 increase, that is significant, and maybe we can't
25 give raises. Maybe we can't replace equipment that

1 needs to -- because technology changes every day,
2 to continue to offer the services to our community
3 that we currently offer, and also to improve those,
4 or to do new service lines. The financial dollar
5 doesn't go as far as it used to, as everybody
6 knows.

7 We are in a unique line of service that we
8 can't raise our fees to get more money. We are
9 about 70 -- probably 60 percent Medicare and
10 Medicaid, and they tell us what they are going to
11 pay us for what we have to do. We don't get to go
12 and say, hey, we would like a 10-percent increase
13 or a 40-percent increase. We just have to continue
14 to do better with less, because they are constantly
15 -- we are fighting insurance companies for our
16 dollars. It's getting worse.

17 Before COVID, we were doing well financially.
18 Since COVID, it's been a struggle. It's been a
19 challenge. We try our best to control the costs
20 that we can control, because, there again, we are
21 in a service industry that we can't raise our
22 rates. We try to negotiate better insurance
23 contracts, and so forth, but we are a small
24 hospital. We struggle, like most hospitals in
25 America today, since COVID.

1 I would just ask that you consider -- I heard
2 someone say something about a tiered rate increase.
3 That might help us with budgets. I also wear the
4 hat of a school board representative recently
5 elected. That would help us with our budgets going
6 forward, and not have their initial impact of a
7 40-percent increase in electricity.

8 So I would ask that you consider all that,
9 because there is a lot of -- a lot of good that our
10 county is doing in the school system, in the city,
11 the hospital, we are all trying to make things
12 better for our citizens. But when we get
13 restricted financially because of big increases
14 like this, it could limit the services and the
15 things that we provide for our community.

16 And we know most businesses that charge for
17 something, they are going to pass it along. That's
18 what FPU is doing to us. They are passing along
19 the charges, you know, the destruction from the
20 hurricane, they are passing along to the consumer.
21 We can't do that. Other folks can. But
22 ultimately, everybody in this room that pays
23 electricity will be impacted if you do that.

24 So I suggest -- I would prefer -- the hospital
25 would prefer no increase, but if we can, for

1 budgetary purposes, if we could get some type of
2 tiered so that we can prepare for it so we know
3 what's coming, that would help us immensely.

4 So thank you for urban time.

5 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you for your
6 testimony.

7 Commissioners, any questions?

8 Seeing none. Thank you, sir.

9 MR. TRIERWEILER: Charles Collins, and Meghan
10 Austin and Cindy Eade.

11 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Mr. Collins, you are
12 recognized, sir.

13 MR. COLLINS: Thank you. Charles Collins, I
14 am from Cottondale, but I kind of put my head in
15 the mineshaft, but I am a propane customer, and I
16 can't afford it. In fact, you know, my charge for
17 propane is with Florida Public Utilities, and now
18 my empty tank it cost me \$25 more a year than it
19 two good a couple years back when Chipola owned it,
20 and I am also retired Air Force.

21 UNIDENDIFIED SPEAKER: Hoorah.

22 MR. COLLINS: Is this meeting preceding the
23 one in Fernandina or subsequent?

24 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: This is afterwards.

25 MR. COLLINS: Pardon?

1 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: This is after. The meeting
2 in Fernandina was back in December.

3 MR. COLLINS: Okay. Now, is this proposed
4 increase aggregate between your two covered areas,
5 or was there some kind of a proportional division?

6 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: If you want to lay out the
7 questions you have, and then the company will, if
8 they want to answer them at the end, they may, but
9 if you want to lay out the questions.

10 MR. COLLINS: Well, like I said, I have more
11 questions than statements.

12 Basically, the dynamics, demographics and
13 economics of Fernandina are vastly -- I am from
14 Jacksonville originally, I was stationed at
15 Tyndall. I owned property and lived her since '99.
16 I am familiar with both areas. So like I said, the
17 economics, the dynamics, the demographics are
18 vastly different, and whether they are not -- I
19 know how Fernandina has grown, you know, I have
20 relatives in Jacksonville, so I go out there. I
21 don't understand how you compare the increase
22 across both of your service areas. I haven't read
23 this 300-page report, so I don't know. But, you
24 know, the ratio of cost of service for Jackson
25 County as opposed to, you know, the Fernandina

1 area, have to be vastly different, okay. And one
2 of the questions I raise is, are you using part of
3 this proposal to help for Jackson County to
4 subsidize Fernandina's cost of service? Food for
5 thought.

6 With that being said, any -- we have already
7 fought with Jackson County for our property tax
8 increases and other things. What's to stop FEECA
9 from coming back, and we will have another meeting
10 for their rate increase?

11 And one thought follows another. These are
12 things I am proposing to the Commission, you know,
13 and across the utility, you know, how is this ratio
14 being applied? And where does it stop? I mean, is
15 Jackson County being used to subsidize Fernandina's
16 development? Because we certainly haven't seen,
17 you know, any kind of infrastructure development
18 here in Jackson County.

19 That's all I got to say.

20 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you.

21 And I will just remind you, we also have staff
22 from the Commission. Maybe someone from our staff
23 would like to help just explain the rate case
24 process, and so forth. That might be helpful.

25 MR. COLLINS: I'm sorry.

1 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Someone from our staff,
2 from the Public Service Commission staff will be
3 able to help you understand the rate case process,
4 and what's included and what's not, kind of give
5 you more of an overview, if you want to visit with
6 them, the customer service folks are here.

7 MR. COLLINS: Thank you.

8 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you.

9 Let's move to the next speaker -- or next
10 customer.

11 MS. AUSTIN: Hey. Hi there. Good afternoon.
12 Thank you guys for being here and listening to all
13 of us. My name is Meghan Austin. My mom is also
14 here in the audience, Cindy Eade, and we are
15 representing three small businesses here in
16 Marianna.

17 We have Cindale Farms, which is a dairy farm
18 just north of town; Southern Craft Creamery, which
19 is an ice cream manufacturer, wholesale and
20 retailer, right in the heart of Marianna, and
21 Southern Craft Creamery Market, where we process
22 and model or our own milk.

23 As so many before stated, I strongly oppose
24 the rate increase. As a small business owner, like
25 you have heard from so many others, even outside of

1 business ownership, but maybe in city and county
2 positions, things, as you guys know, are really,
3 really hard, and the cost of everything have become
4 astronomical.

5 So as a business owner, with this proposed
6 increase, I ran some quick numbers on one of our
7 businesses, and we already pay 47 percent above
8 state average for our electric usage. Increasing
9 that just seems crazy to me. And it becomes, as a
10 business owner, I have a few options, right? I can
11 go out of business, or I can try to cut costs
12 somewhere else, which we have already been doing
13 tremendously, or I can pass those costs, as Mr.
14 Torbett said, along to my customers.

15 Well, most of our customers are the same
16 people that are sitting in this audience, so we are
17 just punishing ourselves over and over again. So
18 we are potentially limiting our ability to have
19 small businesses in this community and this county,
20 as another small business owner spoke to, when we
21 are trying so incredibly hard to increase small
22 businesses within our towns in this county.

23 Just a quick statement, as Mr. Dean spoke to
24 earlier about FPU's supposed increase in customer
25 service. I wish I had the hours recorded and the

1 frustrations that I have trying to communicate with
2 FPU. I know a lot of the city and county have a
3 great relationship. But as a small business owner
4 that may be while my costs paid to FPU are pretty
5 large, they are smaller than other customers. So
6 as small business owner, and then a regular
7 resident, it's nearly impossible to speak to
8 people.

9 I recently -- so I have spent hours and hours.
10 My mom actually filed a complaint with the State --
11 sorry, mom -- but we have gone round and round for
12 years trying to get through. I actually was given
13 a local person's number who was my liaison for FPU,
14 because I was so persistent and so frustrated, and
15 she would be the person that I would talk to in
16 order to get anything accomplished.

17 I don't know how many other people have that,
18 but that's kind of sad, that it took me hours of
19 frustration poking at FPU until they gave me
20 someone to be my person to just get anything done.
21 Like, so when we -- when y'all disclosed the office
22 here, we would mail in our checks. We don't pay
23 on-line. I know I am completely capable of doing
24 that. However, there is a 750-dollar limit. And
25 every time I go in and pay, I can only pay \$750.

1 All of my businesses generate more electric cost in
2 a month than \$750. So every time I in and pay, I
3 have to do it in incrementals of \$750 and get
4 charged additionally each time. Super frustrating.
5 So we mail our bills in. Well, for a while, after
6 the office was closed, every bill was late, so I
7 kept getting late charges, so then I kept having to
8 communicate.

9 All of this to say customer service really,
10 really, really abysmal, and to be charged the types
11 of fees that were charged, and to claim that the
12 customer service has been improved is really
13 frustrating. And I am sure many people here could
14 say the same.

15 And then I just have kind of a general
16 question for FPU, and I have kind of spoken to
17 earlier. As a fellow business owner -- now we are
18 talking about a business here -- as a company that,
19 you know, you stress you have had extremely high
20 costs, you are having trouble controlling those
21 costs. At what point is your business model not
22 sufficient for your customers? Maybe there is
23 someone else that's more adept at taking care of
24 the electric needs of this community than FPU.
25 That's just my thoughts, and kind of a question for

1 you guys and the company as a whole.

2 Thank you so much.

3 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you.

4 Commissioners, any questions?

5 Great. Thank you very much.

6 Let's continue.

7 MR. TRIERWEILER: Next up we have Roy Baker
8 and Dean Wickham is on standby. That's Roy Baker.

9 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Mr. Baker, you are
10 recognized, sir.

11 MR. BAKER: Thank you, Commissioners. I
12 appreciate the job you do. I appreciate it. I
13 have got friends here who work for Florida Public
14 Utilities. I have got some more, and I love all my
15 friends. Some of them are not here today, they are
16 out in the cold, but last couple of nights, I got
17 to sleep in a warm bed because I had some electric
18 service.

19 I can echo what Mr. Mattock -- thank you for
20 your service -- Mr. Long, Mr. Dean, Mr. Riley all
21 said. I am just going to cut it short and give you
22 a couple figures related to Jackson, Calhoun and
23 Liberty County.

24 Mr. Mattock is one of the few people that have
25 moved to the area. These three counties are at a

1 negative growth rate. That's a difficult thing to
2 attract people to move to an area when the rates
3 are going up, the cost of living is going up,
4 things of that nature. You go downtown, and
5 businesses aren't there any longer. Why? Because
6 rates are going up for everything. There needs to
7 be some give and take.

8 Another thing I would like to point out, all
9 three of these counties, the population, the senior
10 population, 65 and older, Jackson is 21 percent,
11 Calhoun is 18 percent, and Liberty is 14 percent.

12 Per capita has been mentioned. The household
13 income, 40 percent of Jackson County is less than
14 \$35,000; 41 percent Calhoun County, and 37 percent
15 Liberty is less than \$35,000 household income.

16 The poverty level 19 percent in Jackson
17 County; 20 percent in Calhoun; 22 percent in
18 Liberty.

19 SNAP household aid -- the households receiving
20 Food Stamps, 18 percent in Jackson County; 21
21 percent in Calhoun; 32 percent in Liberty.

22 The difficulty for these communities, these
23 three counties -- I live in Jackson, but the other
24 two included -- the difficulty to make ends meet,
25 it just won't be possible. It will not be

1 possible.

2 But I will echo what these gentlemen said
3 before me and, again, thank you for coming and
4 having this meeting with us.

5 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you for your
6 testimony.

7 Any other questions, Commissioners?

8 Excellent. Thank you, sir.

9 MR. TRIERWEILER: Thank you.

10 Dean Wickham. Is Dean still with us?

11 Okay. Moving on to the last two that I have.
12 Soshani Richardson and Gwendolyn Borders.

13 MS. RICHARDSON: Hello. Good afternoon. I am
14 speaking just to add my two cents for when I got my
15 letter in the mail from FPU.

16 I moved here from South Florida. I have been
17 here since about May. So six, seven months or so.
18 My profession is I am a tax preparer. And I don't
19 just do taxes, I help my clients manage their cost
20 of living with their finances while helping them,
21 you know, find tax shelters, or reduce their tax
22 income, and I help them find community resources.

23 Within my first month or two here in this
24 county, I helped five residents, me being a new
25 resident here, find resources on how to pay their

1 energy bill, because they didn't -- they were not
2 aware of the resources here. And I know you guys
3 are aware of South Florida, because FPL down there
4 just did this enormous price hike with their rates
5 to the state judge, Supreme Court judge, had to
6 intervene as, like, you need to justify your rates.

7 Just to give you a little back story. I moved
8 up here because down there, they had so many
9 investors from New York buy out all the residential
10 homes and make them rental properties and jack up
11 the rent to above median income, where nobody could
12 afford it. You had people -- and I am born and
13 raised here in Florida. Not from any other
14 country, states, born and raised. And it was not
15 like how when I was coming up.

16 When I seen so many people live out of their
17 storage units, that's how bad the greed with the
18 corporations, and then the commissioners not
19 representing their residents, that's how bad it
20 got. People were living out of storage units. And
21 then FPL, with this ginormous energy bill, nobody
22 could pay their cost of living.

23 So I came here, and I was just like, this is
24 blissful. The people are friendlier here several
25 times. You never get that down there. If you have

1 a problem -- like, I will give you an example.

2 I was walking from Walmart. There is this guy
3 and his family walking out of the store with me.
4 The father told his son, go walk with your sister
5 and your mother, because there was an incident
6 where there was human trafficking going on, and
7 these guys were waiting outside of Walmart to
8 snatch people. This man, who didn't know me from
9 Adam, came and walked me to my car for safety.
10 That never happens in South Florida. I was just
11 amazed. I was in awe. And just walking down the
12 street, good morning. This and that. It's like,
13 how are you doing? The conversations I had, how to
14 plant my flowers when you buy them by the loads.
15 You don't have that in South Florida. Everybody is
16 in survival mode.

17 And I would like to kind of preserve that
18 here, you know, because it's coming. The greed is
19 coming. Just by looking at different places to
20 rent up here, there are some New Yorkers here that
21 own property here, and it's not maintained.

22 I have -- where I am now, it's owned by Broad
23 Management Group, a company that's from New York.
24 The property management is from Alabama. They are
25 not familiar with Florida standards. One of the

1 problems I have is the AC unit is old. And I used
2 to work in contracting services, and I know what
3 happens when the AC, it starts running down, it
4 makes your energy bill go up.

5 So I report it. They don't care. Unless it's
6 completely destroyed, you are going to have to keep
7 paying that high cost of the light bill because
8 your air conditioner is not running at full
9 capacity. It's not being efficient enough.

10 So what I wanted to bring to your attention
11 was, upon moving here, just giving you that
12 background story. I called for a quote just to see
13 how much it would cost to turn on utilities here.
14 The customer service rep put in an order instead of
15 giving me a quote. I was charged for five days
16 before I got the keys to my apartment. Five days.
17 And that was in May. It took until October for
18 them to credit my light bill, and the fees were
19 going on, the late fees, you know, penalties. For
20 me to get on the phone with the maximum time was
21 two hours for me to get a human to talk on the
22 phone. And then it was just like, I can't. I have
23 so much going on. So I was just calling every time
24 I got my bill, when are you going to fix this?
25 When are you going to fix this?

1 I actually had to call you guys, the Florida
2 Public Service Commission, and make a complaint.
3 That was the only time I got anybody to call to
4 address the issue. Then they didn't credit me the
5 full overcharge. The feedback that I got from the
6 person who was my advocate, she said my manager
7 said, instead of the five days, she's only going to
8 credit you four, because there is no way a person
9 can use that much electricity on the first day.
10 And they didn't even refund the taxes that were
11 charged for every dollar that was paid.

12 I do have the utilities, if you want to say
13 see it. And I have a the text messages if you want
14 me to provide that too.

15 But -- and then when you do get -- I mean, out
16 of the six customer service reps that I spoke with,
17 there was one that was nice and mannerable. They
18 were all -- the other ones were all snippy. They
19 got an attitude problem. Well, you should have did
20 this. You should have did that, or -- but I am,
21 like, I am calling, and do you have it in the
22 record? What is your turnover time? They are not
23 answering the questions.

24 And even on the back of the utility bill, I
25 don't know if you saw it from the other gentleman,

1 when it breaks down the fees, and it just says, you
2 know what, goes to -- what fee goes to what, it
3 doesn't tell you the percentage for the utility
4 tax. So how do we know what part of our bill is
5 going to the City and County Commission for utility
6 taxes? There is no justification.

7 And then on their letter, it -- they said that
8 they are increasing the rate for purchasing the
9 Northwest Florida substations, and will be
10 refurbishing and rebuilding certain existing
11 substations. That sounds like a business
12 expansion, not a justification for rate increase.
13 Rate increase should go directly towards serving
14 the people, not their business venture, because we
15 don't benefit from that.

16 They are trying to increase customer
17 clientele, but how does that help us maintain our
18 utility bill? You see what I am saying? That
19 means, you should get an investor to invest in your
20 company, or look in your own budget to see, you
21 know.

22 And that's what I was looking for in this
23 letter, like, what is your percentage for customer
24 service? Like, I was looking for a breakdown.
25 They didn't offer that. Like, what are you

1 spending on your expenses to justify rate
2 increases? There no breakdown. There is no math.
3 Just, this is what we are going to do. This is the
4 interim rates. These are the proposed rates, but
5 for what? Why? It's a big question mark, because
6 if you are going to improve infrastructure, then
7 that is a business plan. I don't know if they
8 provided that to you all, but what is it that you
9 are asking for these rate increases for, other than
10 the fact that you had haven't asked for one in 14
11 years? Because if you give the money, how is it
12 going to improve?

13 I would like to propose, even though the cost
14 of living is going up, I understand that, maybe
15 somewhere in your interim rates, but the proposed
16 rates to hit a community this size with the income
17 that the median income that's here, that's too
18 large.

19 And speaking as a person who sees -- I do
20 taxes in five states, and seeing people struggle to
21 meet their life expenses, that is too dramatic. It
22 has to be gradual. When you slap people with
23 income, like, I mean, income hits like this, they
24 are going to drown. They are going to struggle.

25 If, right now, people are asking me as a

1 newcomer here, how do you -- do you know of any
2 place is to help pay with rent, or for utilities,
3 or for this or for that, if a new person like me,
4 they are asking me that, it's a sign that they
5 can't handle that. That's a very large hit, you
6 know.

7 I mean, I would like to propose that if they
8 are trying to do business expansion, number one,
9 they have to prove what their business plan is, and
10 then offer some sort of profit sharing with the
11 County or the City Commission, you know, like we
12 give you shares of our stock, or something, and
13 it's going back into the community and you are
14 relieving the burden from the residents, like the
15 taxes that they have to pay -- or the rates, I am
16 sorry, the rates that they have to pay, wouldn't be
17 imposed on them. It would be the County allocating
18 some sort of funds to a profit sharing, where they
19 are working hand-in-hand, because I heard from, you
20 know, different people, they are saying the
21 hospital and the colleges, that they are working
22 with them. If they have that business
23 relationship, okay, look, we are trying to raise
24 money, let us do this. If you can afford to do
25 this, this is how you will benefit, then you save

1 the residents. You see, because they are only
2 understanding business language, but you have
3 people who are just trying to live. That's the
4 difference.

5 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Understood. Thank you, Ms.
6 Richardson.

7 You did mention you called the Commission and
8 you got -- I guess you spoke to the utility
9 company. Was your issue resolved? They have got a
10 customer service person here, and we can maybe help
11 resolve that further if it's not been.

12 MS. RICHARDSON: Well, like, I left it alone
13 because they refunded me everything except for \$16.
14 And like I said, they didn't refund any of the
15 taxes, but that was it. But I could speak to a
16 customer service person.

17 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Sure. I will kind of let
18 them intervene privately, but they are here to help
19 you with this.

20 MS. RICHARDSON: Okay.

21 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you.

22 The last person I have got on the list, and
23 then of course we will open it up, if anybody else,
24 Mr. Trierweiler.

25 MR. TRIERWEILER: Gwendolyn Borders. Thank

1 you.

2 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Ms. Borders, you are
3 recognized, ma'am.

4 MS. BORDERS: Good afternoon. My name is
5 Gwendolyn Swales Borders, and I have been a
6 resident of Jackson County all my life. I had to
7 -- my father became sick, so I had to pay his light
8 bill, and now I am paying it for myself.

9 My issue is that before I retired, I worked in
10 customer service, and we always tried to make the
11 customer happy. I don't understand why the
12 building on Penn Avenue was closed, because you
13 could easily go in and drop your payment off, or
14 before that, you could go in and pay it. Well, I
15 mailed my one of my payments in, and it took them
16 three weeks to get it. So then I started going
17 over to Winn-Dixie, and we shouldn't have to do
18 that.

19 I had a real serious illness in 2021, and I
20 had to stay in Atlanta, Georgia for about nine
21 months, and then it went to every three months. So
22 I called in, and I asked why is my bill still so
23 high and there is no one living in my home? And
24 they sent someone out, oh, you need a new air
25 conditioner. Okay, I purchased an air conditioner,

1 and it still has not come down. Whenever I am gone
2 for three months, or whatever, it's still at the
3 same rate.

4 So we just need better customer services. And
5 like I said, when they had the office here, people
6 liked going in. The representatives were great.
7 And when I had to call them for my lights, they
8 would come out. But we just need better customer
9 service.

10 And I got my notice late, and I haven't had a
11 chance to research it. So if the Commission decide
12 to go ahead and approve, is there any way that we
13 can appeal it, the decision?

14 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: There is a process, but I
15 will let our staff jump in maybe after you are done
16 speaking to explain that process.

17 MS. BORDERS: Okay. All right. Thank you.

18 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you. I don't have
19 any other speakers signed up.

20 MR. TRIERWEILER: Actually, real quick.

21 Ms. Borders, I wanted to ask you a question as
22 to whether or not you feel like you should speak
23 with the customer service folks about the three
24 months period that you were talking about where
25 your bill remained the same when you were out of

1 the home?

2 MS. BORDERS: Yeah, for nine months, and then
3 I have to go -- I was going every three months, and
4 it was the same thing. And they told me about the
5 air condition, I did that, and it really didn't
6 drop.

7 MR. TRIERWEILER: Okay. Well --

8 MS. BORDERS: Okay.

9 MR. TRIERWEILER: -- would you go ahead and
10 speak with them?

11 MS. BORDERS: Sure.

12 MR. TRIERWEILER: And then we will ask the
13 utility to go ahead and respond back to an inquiry.

14 MS. BORDERS: Yeah, because they were
15 estimating -- they were estimating the bill while I
16 was gone.

17 MR. TRIERWEILER: Okay. Well, would you
18 please check with them afterwards? And we will ask
19 how that got resolved.

20 MS. BORDERS: Okay. Thank you.

21 MR. TRIERWEILER: Thank you.

22 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you.

23 So I don't have any further speakers that have
24 signed up. Is there anyone else here in the room
25 that did not sign up that has not had a chance to

1 speak that would like to speak at this time?

2 MR. MATTOCK: Can I add something, please? I
3 did get to speak --

4 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Sure.

5 MR. MATTOCK: -- just about 15 seconds?

6 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Sure.

7 MR. MATTOCK: So I moved to Marianna, Sleepy
8 Hollow Marianna, and I was greeted by a tornado in
9 January a year ago, was it today?

10 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

11 MR. MATTOCK: It went right through my back
12 yard. It brought pieces of the campers from the RV
13 park. It brought all kind of stuff. Took my
14 gazebo and all my furniture away from my back yard.
15 I got lucky. It just tore some siding off, took
16 the roof off my wellhouse. I took care of most of
17 it myself.

18 Well, USAA came out with an adjuster, and they
19 were prompt and wonderful and they paid everything
20 but my deductible, but now my rates went up. The
21 reason I am telling you this story is \$100 a month
22 it went up. I guess I caused the tornado, okay.

23 So I am just saying this because I know
24 everybody else, when there is a hurricane, or
25 another event, it's just, you know, like a strike

1 against you.

2 After the military, I worked in a restoration
3 business doing water damage, fire damage, crime
4 seen cleanup. And every time a customer would call
5 me out for an estimate, I would encourage them to
6 not file a claim if they could avoid it, and I
7 would help them, if I could, at a discounted rate
8 to prevent them from having to file a claim because
9 it adds up, and it can haunt you for the rest of
10 your time you are in that dwelling.

11 So the reason I am sharing this is I am paying
12 \$1,200 more now this year after the tornado. So if
13 you guys tack on this, I'm probably going to be
14 selling my house. I'm probably going to be moving
15 somewhere else.

16 We wanted to live in Tennessee, but golly,
17 man, the rates up there after COVID, people wanted
18 crazy money, I got to Marianna, and these people
19 had this beautiful brick house for \$270,000. If I
20 picked up that same house and moved it to
21 Tennessee, they wanted 470,000. So I thought I got
22 a really good deal.

23 Well, I am on a fixed income. Retired
24 military don't make a mint. I am just telling you.
25 I didn't make a hell of a lot when I was in. I am

1 making a lot less now.

2 That's all I wanted to say. Thank you.

3 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Great. Thank you.

4 MR. TRIERWEILER: To make sure we are clear on
5 the record, Mr. Mattock, that's John Mattock --

6 MR. MATTOCK: Yes, sir.

7 MR. TRIERWEILER: -- testifying again.

8 MR. MATTOCK: Yes, sir.

9 MR. TRIERWEILER: All right. Thank you.

10 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Yes, sir.

11 MR. RILEY: So I know we got the storm fee
12 that was added on --

13 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Do you mind coming to the
14 microphone?

15 MR. RILEY: Certainly.

16 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: And just said your name for
17 the record.

18 MR. RILEY: Kelly Riley is my name.

19 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Okay.

20 MR. RILEY: Sid's son.

21 So I know we had the storm fee that was added
22 on to our bill for all these years. Are utility
23 companies not required to carry insurance? I mean,
24 every company I have ever worked for, or had some
25 type of fund set aside in order to cover these type

1 things, because every company I have ever worked
2 for that had, you know, a structure, a building, a
3 whatever, they had to carry insurance for them, you
4 know. And if damage happened to it, certainly the
5 employees there, or customers didn't pay for it.
6 We had insurance that covered it.

7 So I don't understand why there is not some
8 type of legislation or something, or regulation to
9 require companies that have these massive
10 infrastructures to carry an insurance. I mean, you
11 know, we have got to carry -- we have already been
12 slapped by this monster storm, and then they come
13 along and slap us with the cost of repairing it,
14 you know. So it just seems reasonable that we
15 should have insurance, that they should be required
16 to insure that. I realize there is a cost involved
17 with that also, but I would like to see a
18 comparison anyway --

19 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Sure.

20 MR. RILEY: -- of what it costs.

21 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Excellent, well, thank
22 you --

23 MR. RILEY: Thank you.

24 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: -- thank you for your
25 testimony.

1 Anybody else in the audience?

2 Okay. Not seeing anybody else.

3 Commissioners, any other further additional
4 comments that we would like to address while we are
5 here? Seeing none.

6 I thank everybody for your time. As you can
7 see, obviously, there has been a lot of speakers,
8 certainly more than average than that we have in
9 our typical customer service hearings, so again,
10 very much appreciative of you guys coming out and
11 sharing your thoughts and your comments with us.
12 Again, a lot of this is taken in. Of course, we
13 have a more formal process throughout the entire
14 hearing process.

15 I thank the County for helping us and
16 facilitating a location. Doing these type of
17 meetings are not an easy thing. Obviously, you see
18 we come with a lot of people, also equipment, and
19 the ability to be able to broadcast and make sure
20 that these meetings are as transparent as possible.

21 Not seeing any further business before us, I
22 will go ahead and call this meeting adjourned, and
23 thank you all for attending.

24 Thanks.

25 (Proceedings concluded.)

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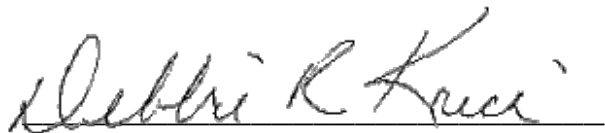
STATE OF FLORIDA)
COUNTY OF LEON)

I, DEBRA KRICK, Court Reporter, do hereby
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I FURTHER CERTIFY that I am not a relative,
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DATED this 23rd day of January, 2025.



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