

476.3 Complaints — investigation — refunds.

1. A public utility shall furnish reasonably adequate service at rates and charges in accordance with tariffs filed with the board. When there is filed with the board by any person or body politic, or filed by the board upon its own motion, a written complaint requesting the board to determine the reasonableness of the rates, charges, schedules, service, regulations, or anything done or omitted to be done by a public utility subject to this chapter in contravention of this chapter, the written complaint shall be forwarded by the board to the public utility, which shall be called upon to satisfy the complaint or to answer it in writing within a reasonable time to be specified by the board. Copies of the written complaint forwarded by the board to the public utility and copies of all correspondence from the public utility in response to the complaint shall be provided by the board in an expeditious manner to the consumer advocate. If the board determines the public utility's response is inadequate and there appears to be any reasonable ground for investigating the complaint, the board shall promptly initiate a formal proceeding. If the consumer advocate determines the public utility's response to the complaint is inadequate, the consumer advocate may file a petition with the board which shall promptly initiate a formal proceeding if the board determines that there is any reasonable ground for investigating the complaint. The complainant or the public utility also may petition the board to initiate a formal proceeding which petition shall be granted if the board determines that there is any reasonable ground for investigating the complaint. The formal proceeding may be initiated at any time by the board on its own motion. If a proceeding is initiated upon petition filed by the consumer advocate, complainant, or the public utility, or upon the board's own motion, the board shall set the case for hearing and give notice as it deems appropriate. When the board, after a hearing held after reasonable notice, finds a public utility's rates, charges, schedules, service, or regulations are unjust, unreasonable, discriminatory, or otherwise in violation of any provision of law, the board shall determine just, reasonable, and nondiscriminatory rates, charges, schedules, service, or regulations to be observed and enforced.

2. If, as a result of a review procedure conducted under section 476.31, a review conducted under section 476.32, a special audit, an investigation by division staff, or an investigation by the consumer advocate, a petition is filed with the board by the consumer advocate, alleging that a utility's rates are excessive, the disputed amount shall be specified in the petition. The public utility shall, within the time prescribed by the board, file a bond or undertaking approved by the board conditioned upon the refund in a manner prescribed by the board of amounts collected after the date of filing of the petition in excess of rates or charges finally determined by the board to be lawful. If upon hearing the board finds that the utility's rates are unlawful, the board shall order a refund, with interest, of amounts collected after the date of filing of the petition that are determined to be in excess of the amounts which would have been collected under the rates finally approved. However, the board shall not order a refund that is greater than the amount specified in the petition, plus interest, and if the board fails to render a decision within ten months following the date of filing of the petition, the board shall not order a refund of any excess amounts that are collected after the expiration of that ten-month period and prior to the date the decision is rendered.

Notwithstanding the provisions of this subsection, the consumer advocate shall not file a petition under this subsection that alleges a local exchange carrier's rates are excessive while the local exchange carrier is participating in a price regulation plan approved by the board pursuant to section 476.97.

3. A determination of utility rates by the board pursuant to this section that is based upon a departure from previously established regulatory principles shall apply prospectively from the date of the decision.

[C66, 71, 73, 75, §490A.3; C77, 79, 81, §476.3; 81 Acts, ch 156, §5, 9]

83 Acts, ch 127, §17, 18; 89 Acts, ch 59, §1; 89 Acts, ch 97, §1; 95 Acts, ch 199, §2