

CHAPTER 6
COMPLAINT PROCEDURES
[Previously ch 1, renumbered 10/20/75 Supp.]
[Prior to 10/8/86, Commerce Commission[250]]

199—6.1(476) Inquiry. Any person may seek assistance from the Iowa utilities board by appearing in person or placing a telephone call to the Consumer Services Section, Iowa Utilities Board, 1375 E. Court Avenue, Room 69, Des Moines, Iowa, (515)725-7321 or toll-free (877)565-4450. Consumer services may advise the person of the application of the rules, inform the person of utility complaint procedures and advise of written complaint procedures before the board. However, the complaint procedures set forth below are available only after a written complaint is filed.

[Editorial change: IAC Supplement 12/29/10]

199—6.2(476) Complaint. Any person or body politic may file a written complaint requesting a determination of the reasonableness of rates, charges, schedules, service, regulations or anything done or not done by a public utility subject to service or rate regulation by the board. Assistance may be requested in the following manner.

6.2(1) Information to be filed. Any person may, by filing a written complaint, request the board to determine whether the utility's charges, practices, facilities or services are in compliance with applicable statutes and rules established by the board, or by the utility in its tariff, and lawfully issued board orders. A written complaint may be filed by facsimile or electronic mail. If there is any question about the authenticity of the complaint, the complainant may be required to file a letter verifying the written complaint. The board may initiate a complaint on its own motion. The complaint should include:

a. The name of the utility, any utility personnel known or believed to be familiar with the facts stated in the letter and the location of the office of the utility where the complaint was originally made and processed.

b. The name of the complainant. If the complaint is being filed on behalf of a person other than the complainant, an affidavit from the person injured by the practice about which the complaint is made should be included stating that the complaint has been received and is believed to be true and accurate to the best of the knowledge of the injured person. A complaint filed by an organization on behalf of its members shall include an affidavit signed by an officer of the organization.

c. The address of the premises where the service or billing problems occurred and, if known, the telephone number and the account number. If the complainant resides at a different address, the complaint should also state where a response to the complaint is to be mailed. The complainant may also provide a telephone number where the complainant can be reached during the day.

d. The nature of the complaint, and efforts made to resolve the matter. Documents—e.g., bills or correspondence—should be included if they will add to the board's understanding of the utility practice about which the complaint is made. If known, references to statutes or rules believed to govern the outcome of the complaint should be included.

e. A proposal for resolving the complaint. The proposal should refer to any known statutes or rules authorizing the remedy request.

6.2(2) Request for additional information. If the staff determines that additional information is needed in order to resolve the complaint, the complainant will be notified that specified additional information should be filed. If the requested additional information is not provided within 20 days, the complaint may be dismissed. Dismissal of the complaint on this basis does not prevent the complainant from filing in the future a complaint that includes the requested information.

199—6.3(476) Processing the complaint. When the board receives a complaint that includes necessary information outlined in rule 199—6.2(476), the following complaint procedures will be followed:

6.3(1) The complaint letter and any supplemental information filed by the complainant will be forwarded to the public utility.

6.3(2) A copy of the complaint and any supplemental information will be forwarded by the staff to the consumer advocate.

6.3(3) The utility shall, within 20 days of the date on which the complaint is forwarded to the utility by the board, file a response to the complaint with the board and shall at the same time send a copy of its response to the complainant and the consumer advocate. The utility shall specifically address each allegation made by the complainant and recite any supporting facts, statutes, rules, or tariff provisions supporting its response. The utility shall enclose copies of all related letters, records, or other documents not supplied by the complainant, and all records concerning the complainant that are not confidential or privileged. In cases involving confidential or privileged records, the response shall advise of the records' existence.

199—6.4(476) Proposed resolution.

6.4(1) When the utility response is received, the staff may request from any party any additional information deemed necessary to resolve the complaint. When satisfied that all necessary information has been gathered, the staff will respond by letter to the complainant with a copy to the utility and consumer advocate acknowledging resolution of the complaint or proposing an appropriate resolution of the complaint.

6.4(2) If the staff determines that the action required by the proposed resolution has not been carried out, or new facts arise, the record may be reopened by issuing notice to the parties of further investigation.

199—6.5(476) Initiating formal complaint proceedings.

6.5(1) If the consumer advocate, complainant, or the public utility is dissatisfied with the proposed resolution, a request for formal complaint proceedings may be made. Parties will be informed of their right to request formal proceedings. A request for civil penalties, in accordance with Iowa Administrative Code 199—Chapter 8, may also be filed at this time. Failure to file a request for civil penalties at this time does not preclude a party from requesting civil penalties at a later date during formal proceedings. If no request for formal proceedings is made within 14 days after issuance of the proposed resolution or the specified date of utility action, the proposed resolution will be deemed binding on all parties. The board may initiate formal proceedings and seek civil penalties at any time on its own motion.

6.5(2) The request for formal complaint proceedings shall be filed within 14 days after issuance of the proposed resolution or the specified date of utility action, whichever is later. The request shall be considered as filed on the date of the United States Postal Service postmark, the date personal service is made, or the date received and accepted in the board's records and information center. The request shall be in writing and must be delivered by United States Postal Service, other delivery service, personal service, or through the board's electronic filing system pursuant to 199—Chapter 14. The request shall include the file number (C-XX-XXX or C-XXXX-XXXX) marked on the proposed resolution. It shall explain why the proposed resolution should be modified or rejected and propose an alternate resolution, including any temporary relief desired. Copies of the request shall be mailed to the consumer advocate and the parties.

6.5(3) Upon receipt of a request for formal complaint proceedings, the board shall consider whether formal complaint proceedings should be initiated and issue an order. If the board denies formal complaint proceedings, a party may file a petition for judicial review either in the Polk County district court or in the district court for the county in which the party resides or has its principal place of business pursuant to Iowa Code section 17A.19. If formal complaint proceedings are initiated, an order will be issued docketing the case as a formal complaint and granting or denying, in whole or in part, any temporary relief requested.

199—6.6(476) Applicable procedures. When the complaint is docketed as a formal proceeding, the procedures set forth in 199—Chapter 7 of these rules will apply.

199—6.7(476) Record. The written complaint and all supplemental information shall be made part of the record in the formal complaint proceeding.

199—6.8(476) Special procedures for complaints alleging unauthorized changes in telecommunications services. Notwithstanding the deregulation of a communications service or facility pursuant to Iowa Code section 476.1D, complaints alleging an unauthorized change in telecommunications service (see rule 199—22.23(476)) will be processed pursuant to the rules set forth in this chapter with the following additional or substituted procedures:

6.8(1) Upon receipt of the complaint and with the customer's acknowledgment, a copy of the complaint or a notification of receipt of a telephone, or other oral, complaint will be forwarded to the executing service provider and the preferred service provider as a request for a change in the customer's service to the customer's preferred service provider, unless the service has already been changed to the preferred service provider.

6.8(2) The complaint or notification of receipt of a telephone, or other oral, complaint will also be forwarded to the alleged unauthorized service provider. That entity shall file a response to the complaint within ten days of the date the complaint or notification of receipt of a telephone, or other oral, complaint was forwarded. The response must include proof of verification of the customer's authorization for a change in service or a statement that the unauthorized service provider does not have such proof of verification.

6.8(3) If the alleged unauthorized service provider includes with its response alleged proof of verification of the customer's authorization for a change in service, then the response will be forwarded to the customer. The customer will have ten days to challenge the verification or otherwise reply to the service provider's response.

6.8(4) As a part of the informal complaint proceedings, board staff may issue a proposed resolution to determine the potential liability, including assessment of damages, for unauthorized changes in service among the customer, the previous service provider, the executing service provider, and the submitting service provider, and any other interested person. In the event of a soft slam (as defined in 199 IAC 22.23(1) "j"), board staff may also propose joint and several liability between the reseller and the facilities-based service provider. In all cases, the proposed resolution shall allocate responsibility among the interested persons on the basis of their relative responsibility for the events that are the subject matter of the complaint. For purposes of this rule and in the absence of unusual circumstances, the term "damages" means charges directly relating to the telecommunications services provided to the customer that have appeared or may appear on the customer's bill. The term "damages" does not include incidental, consequential, or punitive damages.

6.8(5) If the complainant, the service provider, consumer advocate, or any other interested person directly affected by the proposed decision is dissatisfied with the proposed resolution, a request for formal complaint proceedings may be filed. A request for formal complaint proceedings will be processed by the board pursuant to 199 IAC 6.5(476) et seq.

If no request for formal complaint proceedings is received by the board within 14 days after issuance of the proposed resolution, the proposed resolution will be deemed binding upon all persons notified of the informal proceedings and affected by the proposed resolution. Notwithstanding the binding nature of any proposed resolution as to the affected persons, the board may at any time and on its own motion initiate formal proceedings which may alter the allocation of liability.

6.8(6) No entity shall commence any actions to re-bill, directly bill, or otherwise collect any disputed charges for a change in service until after board action on the complaint is final. If final board action finds that the change in service was unauthorized and determines the customer should pay some amount less than the billed amount, the service provider is prohibited from re-billing or taking any other steps whatsoever to collect the difference between the allowed charges and the original charges.

These rules are intended to implement Iowa Code sections 476.2, 476.3 and 546.7 and Iowa Code Supplement section 476.103.

[Filed prior to 7/4/51]

[Filed without Notice 10/8/75—published 10/20/75]

[Filed 2/11/76, Notice 7/14/76—published 2/23/76, effective 3/29/76]

[Filed emergency 6/3/83—published 6/22/83, effective 7/1/83]

[Filed 11/4/83, Notice 8/31/83—published 11/23/83, effective 1/1/84]

[Filed 5/18/84, Notice 2/15/84—published 6/6/84, effective 7/11/84]¹
[Filed emergency 9/18/86—published 10/8/86, effective 9/18/86]
[Filed 5/29/87, Notice 3/11/87—published 6/17/87, effective 9/16/87]
[Filed 10/16/87, Notice 8/26/87—published 11/4/87, effective 12/9/87]
[Filed 9/14/90, Notice 11/29/89—published 10/3/90, effective 11/7/90]
[Published 6/17/98 to update name and address of board]
[Filed emergency 7/23/99—published 8/11/99, effective 8/2/99]
[Filed 4/28/00, Notice 8/11/99—published 5/17/00, effective 6/21/00]
[Filed 11/19/03, Notice 4/2/03—published 12/10/03, effective 1/14/04]
[Filed 10/31/08, Notice 4/9/08—published 11/19/08, effective 12/24/08]
[Editorial change: IAC Supplement 12/29/10]

¹ Effective date of chapter 6 delayed 70 days by administrative rules review committee