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BY COURIER

August 19, 2016

Ms. Kirsten Walli
Board Secretary
Ontario Energy Board
Suite 2700, 2300 Yonge Street
P.O. Box 2319
Toronto, ON
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Dear Ms. Walli,

EB-2016-0179 – Ontario Energy Board Notice of Proposal to Amend Codes and Rules – Hydro One Networks Inc's Written Comments

On July 22, 2016, the Ontario Energy Board (the “Board” or “OEB”) issued a Notice of Proposal to Amend OEB Codes and Rules to introduce new enforceable regulatory requirements to the Distribution System Code, the Unit Sub-Metering Code, the Electricity Retailer Code of Conduct, the Code of Conduct for Gas Marketers and the Gas Distribution Access Rule (collectively, OEB Codes and Rules) with respect to how electricity and gas distributors, unit sub-meter providers, electricity retailers and gas marketers (collectively, Regulated Entities) respond to consumer complaints forwarded by the OEB.

This is Hydro One Networks Inc’s (“HONI”) comments on the Board’s Notice. This submission has been filed via the Board’s web portal and three (3) requisite paper copies have been couriered to the Board.

As a customer-focused organization HONI recognizes that the manner in which consumer complaints are addressed can have a material impact on customer satisfaction levels. As such, HONI appreciates the opportunity to comment on the proposed changes to the Board’s consumer complaint response process. HONI believes that the Board’s complaints process should act as a complement to HONI’s own efforts to address consumer complaints.

The following are HONI’s comments specifically with respect to the Distribution System Code amendments proposed by the Board. Where HONI does not have any concerns with an amendment it is not covered below.

10 Consumer Complaint Response Process

Section 10.2

As written, this section appears to require a distributor to provide the consumer with the OEB contact information at the consumer complaint intake stage. HONI has a robust process for addressing consumer complaints that includes: contacting our Customer Call Centre (CCC), speaking to a supervisor, escalation to the Customer Relations Centre (CRC), and directing the consumer to the Hydro One Ombudsman. While OEB contact information should be made available to consumers in due course, HONI believes it is important that it has the opportunity to fully investigate and respond to consumer complaints through its normal complaints escalation process. Not doing so has the potential to significantly increase OEB complaints, which could impede HONI's ability to serve the remaining customers and disadvantage those customers who choose to follow the normal escalation process.

This concern can, in part, be addressed by the following proposed wording change to section 10.2:

“When a consumer has gone through the distributor’s normal escalation process and expresses dissatisfaction with the distributor’s response to their complaint, the distributor shall inform the consumer that the consumer can contact the OEB, and shall at the same time provide the consumer with the OEB’s designated toll-free telephone number or local telephone number (as requested by the consumer), and the web site address designated by the OEB for that purpose.”

Consistent with the views expressed above, HONI also believes it is important that inquiries made to the OEB are vetted to ensure that consumers have fully attempted to address their complaints through the utility before the OEB consumer complaint response process is activated.

Section 10.6

The Board indicates that part of its rationale for shortening the response timeline for "all other complaint cases" to 10 days is that “in most cases, a Regulated Entity will have had prior knowledge of a customer’s complaint before the complaint is escalated to the OEB by the customer”. It is HONI’s experience that the majority of complaints referred from the OEB require time to gather information from our customer service and field resources in order to properly investigate the complaints forwarded.

With respect to the inclusion of complaints related to disconnection of a consumer’s property, for a response within 2 business days, it is HONI’s experience that the majority of OEB complaints referred in this timeframe to HONI are collections related. And while the customer may be unhappy about HONI collecting on outstanding arrears, including interruption of service, this proposed process should not enable a delay of the appropriate steps for collecting of outstanding arrears. Additionally, past experience with disconnection related complaints that have been forwarded from the OEB is that HONI is compliant with both its own processes and regulations with respect to service interruptions/disconnections, and as such HONI believes that collection related complaints should not be part of the 2 day turnaround requirement.

It would also be helpful if the Board could provide greater specificity or clarification of the criteria that Designated OEB Staff will apply in determining “an unduly adverse impact on the consumer or consumers” in order to anticipate and manage escalation turnaround times, as well as, achieving consistent outcomes.

Section 10.7

HONI understand that Section 10.7(f) and related Section 10.9 require that where a mutually-agreed upon resolution to the satisfaction of the consumer is reached on an OEB consumer complaint, in addition to confirming the arrangements and timelines, distributors must also provide progress updates on arrangement timelines. If that is correct, this new requirement will impose additional administrative burden associated with establishing the systems and process to track and report progress. An alternative may be to report only when the arrangements have been fully met or not fully met (if for some reason it was not possible to fully satisfy the agreed-upon arrangements).

HONI is also concerned that the proposed changes in Section 10.7 suggest that the OEB is moving beyond dealing with questions of utility compliance and into what other actions the utility can take to try and satisfy the customer. HONI is concerned that this shift in the OEB’s role will diminish and confuse the relationship with our customers, and that customers may become conditioned to bypassing the distributor and going directly to the OEB to get “satisfaction”. This will negatively impact HONI’s ability to adequately serve its customers and achieve desired customer satisfaction levels.

Section 10.8

HONI recommends that this section be expanded to clarify that the request for any additional information beyond what is provided under section 10.7 will be made through the OEB Complaint E-Portal, by or on behalf of the Designated OEB Staff.

Section 10.11

Consistent with the requirements of section 10.10, HONI recommends that section 10.11 be expanded to require the Designated OEB Staff respond to the distributor’s request for an extension in a timely manner.

Anticipated Cost and Benefits

The Board notes in their Notice that the proposed amendments to the consumer complaints process builds on procedures that are currently in place and it is therefore anticipated that they can be readily implemented without material incremental costs. However, as noted in the comments above under section 10.2, 10.6 and 10.7, HONI is concerned that the proposed amendments will increase the volume of complaints administered through the OEB process, as well as increasing the administrative effort required to respond to those complaints, both of which will drive an increase to HONI’s on-going customer service costs.

Consumer Complaint Resolution Process Handbook

HONI supports the OEB's plan to develop a Handbook to provide further guidance and direction related to the complaint response process, and we would welcome the opportunity to assist the Board in this effort.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY HENRY ANDRE

Henry Andre on behalf of Oded Hubert