

Letter of Comment - EB-2024-0115

-- Name --

Emma-Rose Beauchamp

-- Do you reside in the impacted service area? -- Yes

-- Comments --

I vehemently disagree with the planned increases to obscure distribution fees. Hydro Ottawa should be held accountable to cost containment measures and proper capital planning and investment. Other consumer facing businesses are required to engage in these efforts and cannot simply force their customers to accept an increase to compensate for deferred maintenance and staffing requirements. Other businesses may raise consumer prices but have to contend with competition from other providers and are at the mercy of consumer choice. This is not the case with Hydro Ottawa and this is all the more reason they should face significant scrutiny for any cost increase requests. This requested increase comes at a time where unemployment is rising, and projected to continue. Wages remain stagnant and costs are increasing beyond historical rates of inflation. Add in economic uncertainty resulting from geopolitical events and it should be clear that every requested increase for required services such as utilities must be examined within this context. There should be significant consideration paid to the impact this will have on low and fixed income individuals who have limited ability to absorb increases, and will be an increasingly large contingent of Ottawa's population during the 2026-2030 period of requested increase due to demographic factors (decrease immigration and increased average resident age). Unlike changes to usage rates, increases to fixed charges such as distribution should be considered much more intently as these charges do not allow users to adjust behavior/usage to alter costs in the face of increases. This is fundamentally wrong as it acts as an unofficial tax just for living in the area of service. As a private entity and not a publicly owned utility provider, Hydro Ottawa should be responsible for looking inward for cost optimization and recovery strategies instead of being permitted to increase arbitrary base fees that its captive customer base have no choice but to pay. Like many other business, non-profits, and government institutions facing costing pressures and challenges with compensation/expenditures/infrastructure, Hydro Ottawa should be required to make difficult decisions about its organizational priorities and fiscal responsibility. IF an increase is to be considered, it should be in the face of compelling evidence that significant internal measures have been taken to contain costs and improve service delivery. There should be a clear indication of why and how the current fee structure is insufficient to sustain the organization in light of these measures and why the amount of request increase specifically is required to meet the stated goals (after internal savings and efficiencies are calculated).