

**DATA/STORIES
GATHERED THRU INDIVIDUAL OUTREACH
BY NICOLIE BOLSTER
FOR CforAT**

April and May 2013

DATA GATHERED BY NICOLIE BOLSTER
California Public Utilities Rate Structure Change Request
Individual Outreach Responses April & May 2013

	RESPONDENT INFORMATION	STORIES
1	Contra Costa County PG&E Customer	<p>In an email, the respondent wrote:</p> <p>From: XXX@earthlink.net Sent: Friday, April 12, 2013 5:05 AM To: nbolster@dredf.org Subject: Utility rate</p> <p>I am a 72-year old. I have multiple disabilities. I have all the discounts available through PG&E. Here are the things I need to do to keep my utility costs down:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Set my Winter thermostat at 60 degrees - We wear jackets throughout the Winter - I spend 75 per cent of my day/night under 3 feather comforters to stay warm as when my body gets cold my pain level soars. I take prescribed pain killers around the clock. - I have a power wheelchair - I have COPD and use oxygen tanks and a concentrator at least 80 percent of the day and O2 tanks otherwise - I run my TV 24/7 because I live in a high crime rate area so I cannot hear gun shots and screams of my neighbors in domestic conditions, "backyard dogs" who bark all day/night...they are often not fed or given fresh water...yet in the backyards guarding the renter's property. It breaks my heart knowing that these poor animals are abused. - I am up all night because I am afraid to sleep when my home care workers are not working, sleeping many hours while they are here. I get up during these hours. It is cold at night during the Winter especially. - During the Summer hot months, I have difficulty breathing. I use my evaporated cooler day/night and rather than go to the Emergency Room unable to breath I will turn on rarely my portable air conditioner. Last year I turned it on 11 times for an hour to two hours. It was above 100 degrees in my house. <p>My greatest fear is that there will come a day when I cannot pay my bills (it is getting closer and closer) so will have to surrender and move into a nursing home where I will be warehoused for the rest of my life. Of course my life will be shortened as this is a common among those who are warehoused in Medi-Cal nursing homes.</p> <p>I am beginning to feel that my worth as a person, even those I volunteer as a radio show producer for over 30-years is of less and less importance. A rate increase is terrifying!</p> <p>[Identifying information redacted]</p>

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2	Berkeley, CA PG&E Customer	<p>In an email, the respondent wrote:</p> <p>From: XXXXXX@aol.com Sent: Sunday, April 14, 2013 2:05 PM To: nbolster@dredf.org Subject: Electric charges changes story</p> <p>Hi Nicolie,</p> <p>My husband and I are homeowners in the City of Berkeley. We both have muscular dystrophy and use power wheelchairs, my husband is respirator dependent. In addition to this equipment, we depend on an electric bed, heating blanket, electric air pumped mattress. We charge our power chairs nightly. The respirator is run via electricity during the night and battery (charged every night) during the day. As an emergency backup, we run a bi-pap machine to stream air throughout the day. We are both sensitive to being cold so we use our primary house heater (gas) as well as small electric space heaters throughout the year.</p> <p>We are currently receiving discounts for Life Support and Medical through PG&E. We are on a fixed income (LTD) and because we pay out of pocket for personal attendant care (around \$15,000 annually) losing any discount through PG&E would be of great financial hardship to us.</p> <p>Feel free to call us at (510) xxx-xxxx or reply to this email if you have any questions for us.</p> <p>Thanks,</p> <p>[Identifying information redacted]</p>
3	Long Beach, CA SCE Electric Customer	<p>B. R. male PWD: Post-Polio, Parkinson's Disease, stroke, diabetes (vegetarian) SSI and SSA</p> <p>By phone, the respondent said:</p> <p>DEVICES: electric foot warmer for bed for foot circulation; power wheel chair, other electric assistive devices</p> <p>I have Post-Polio, Parkinson's Disease, had a stroke and have diabetes. I have an electric foot warmer for my bed for foot circulation; and I use a power wheel chair. I have other assistive devices and these all use electricity power.</p> <p>My gas and electric bill is approximately 8 % of my monthly income.</p>

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		<p>This winter has been exceptionally cold – so much that my gas bill went from an average of \$15.00 a month to over \$30.00 a month. My electric bill use to run \$17.00 a month and it now averages closer to \$28.00 a month.</p> <p>Food prices have sky rocketed along with clothing, transportation and other necessities - leaving myself most times without the ability to spend anything for entertainment, necessary socializing and movies.</p> <p><u><i>Have you had to make choices to not pay one bill in order to pay your utilities?</i></u></p> <p>I have gone to use of the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) - so not this year. I have also gone to a church and Salvation Army for help.</p> <p>I am a vegetarian and therefore choices for eating out are different than using a cheap taco stand. So it is slightly more expensive ... in order to provide proper nutrition.</p> <p>In years past, Medi-Cal took care of all my medicine costs, but now I have to pay an average of \$5.00 per medicine; and I take a minimum each month of 40 medications. Thus 40 medications times \$5.00 each equals \$200.00 each month for the co-pay for my medications.</p> <p>The cold weather and a cold house has resulted in increased bladder and bowel malfunction – so I have more laundry costs (from the use of more water, electricity and natural gas) to clean up.</p> <p>Avocados use to cost 25 to 45 cents each and are now \$1.00 to \$3.00 each. It is impossible now for me to buy tomatoes and avocados and other healthy fruits and vegetables so necessary to my diet, due to big price increases. Because of the economy, there has been no increase in my income for over 8 years. This leaves persons on SSI and SSA, such as myself, having to bear the brunt of not being able to keep my house warm enough, and lit up enough to enjoy reading or functioning.</p> <p>Any raise in prices to utilities of gas and electricity will cause me hunger and more hospitalizations – thus costing the state more money.</p> <p>Any rise in utility prices is unconscionable for people with disabilities and 80% of our seniors.</p>
4	Marin County PG&E Customer	A. T. female age 68 SS Disability income \$1,050 a month PWD- C4 quadriplegic (spinal cord)

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		<p>By phone, the respondent said:</p> <p>DEVICES: trach [<i>Tracheostomy tube</i>], power chair, suction machine, fan, air conditioner, electric space heater, electric blanket</p> <p>It means so much to me that my electric bill stays discounted and low. Winter electricity bill is high at \$77; summer \$40.</p> <p>No natural gas used, has propane gas system (for hot water heater, for heating, for cooking stove); propane is level monthly payment of \$350.</p> <p>She has been trying so hard to use less propane, so will now be down to \$290 a month (level payments) for the next 12 months.</p> <p>Sensitivity to cold and heat is extreme.</p> <p>Use as much electric heat as I can, with space heater and electric blanket, to minimize propane use (expensive).</p> <p>Live close to ocean, just west of Fairfax [<i>NW of San Rafael</i>] – cold winters and hot summers.</p> <p>Never threatened with turn off of utilities!! But I have to shift things around at the end of month and checks can bounce so a VISA overdraft covers those charges.</p> <p>Before I got my electric blanket, I got too cold – discomfort was great! I used to be <i>able</i> to use a wood stove to heat but now there are wood smoke regulations and it restricts that cost savings.</p> <p>Fortunately no rent, mortgage is paid. Property taxes and food costs. Attendant care- \$4,000 a month through an agency helping some of the elderly– paid by IHSS (\$3,500) and out of pocket (\$500).</p> <p>Summer: I have to limit use of air conditioner so use ice packs (would be used less often).</p> <p>I remember the power outages in the early 2000’s. We had a heat spell in Marin County then, and I remember the electricity was off and the fan did not work.</p>
5	Berkeley, CA PG&E Customer	<p>In an email, the respondent wrote:</p> <p>From: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX</p> <p>Sent: Wednesday, March 27, 2013 9:16 PM</p>

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		<p>To: nbolster@dredf.org Subject: PUC utility rates</p> <p>Hi Nicolie,</p> <p>It's K. here. I am not a low income person, however I spend approximately \$5000 of my monthly income on my attendant care. So, I am having great difficulty making ends meet and I am living in the home of friends and sharing the utilities.</p> <p>I am going to list all the electrical appliances I use for my disability and you can decide if you want to use my story. I use a lot of devices and thought that might help the cause. Warmly, K.</p> <p>I am 69 years old and have Muscular Dystrophy. I have very high medical expenses to the point that I pay no income taxes. I use many devices that are necessary for my health and my mobility. I use a Respirator – BiPAP AVAP, that draws a great deal of energy. I use a hospital bed, and electric inhaler, electric operated suction machine, motorized wheelchair that requires charging every evening, and electrical battery powered ceiling lift for transfers. Because my disability makes me very susceptible to cold, I run my radiant floor heat late fall through mid spring, and frequently on cold summer evenings. I am at home almost 100%.</p> <p>Like many other people with disabilities who are struggling to make ends meet, a raise in utility rates will make my life more difficult in terms of where to spend my limited available monthly income. I urge you to consider the impact a rate hike will have on poor people with disabilities, forcing them, for example, to choose between paying their gas and electricity bill or taking a full dose of medicine, or purchasing healthy food,</p> <p>[Identifying information redacted]</p>
6	San Leandro, CA PG&E Customer	<p>In an email, the respondent wrote:</p> <p>Original Message----- From: XXXXXX@sonic.net Sent: Thursday, March 28, 2013 5:36 PM To: nbolster@dredf.org Subject: utility rate hikes</p> <p>Hi,</p> <p>I am writing to confirm that any more utility rate hikes would be clearly harmful to my family, all of us suffering from Multiple Chemical Sensitivity. We use air purifiers and in our mobile home need to use electric heaters. As a result of being very low income due to</p>

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		<p>the effects of health problems which have completely limited possibilities of income, each time there is a rate hike we are denied more of the healthcare which actually helps us, all of which we have to pay out of pocket. Additionally, we have ended up sick several times a year due to cold, and not using the heater when most people would, simply because it is too expensive to use. I finally sank money into what was supposed to be a superior heater, only to find it did not work much better than what wed <i>[sic]</i> had, so again had to stop using that.</p> <p>People with disabilities often have need of more use of utilities while often being some of the least able to pay and need special protection acknowledging that fact and reality. Sincerely,</p> <p>[Identifying information redacted]</p> <p>-----Original Message----- From: XXXXX@sonic.net Sent: Friday, April 12, 2013 9:52 AM To: nbolster@dredf.org Subject: Just a couple notes more</p> <p>Hi Nicole,</p> <p>I am sorry it seems like not many have provided specific information for attorneys to use. I would strike this up to those with disabilities having so much extra on our platters than some, whether it is the physical such as typing that is slower, or many of us have to devote extraordinary amounts of time in our lives for various appointments, and many of us have such extreme exhaustion. Then there are the healthcare changes going into effect soon which are creating complete panic for many, as is evident when reading through posts on the Berkeley-disabled list.</p> <p>Nonetheless, you need data to be used so in case in what I wrote before it wasn't as clear, I spend at least \$100 on gas and electricity but that is with a bit of a discount on electricity, and is related to not using my air purifier and heater as we should be able to, and related to that, the repeated sickness we have are particularly difficult for our family with our compromised immune systems, but then also cost outright in my having to give extra supplements x 4 of us. And not using the air purifier 24 hours a day? It is hard to place a number on that but I can tell you that I pay thousands of dollars out of pocket yearly for supportive healthcare and supplements (at least \$7000) and that takes into account that we have practitioners who charge us dramatically less than typical. We need more care but literally do not have the money to fund it. It's always balancing which to do, what to pay, and often I end up choosing not to use the air purifier or heater. It's a shell game since not using contributes to outright cost in the longer</p>

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		<p>run, but it's like a gamble that only has losers.</p> <p>[Identifying information redacted]</p> <p>=====</p> <p><i>Wed 4/3/2013 11:11 AM</i></p> <p><i>My I ask again <u>two questions</u>:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Have you ever been forced to choose between paying your utility bill and a bill for another essential service, such as medicine, food, transportation, a medical bill?</i> <p>=====</p> <p>-----Original Message-----</p> <p>From: XXXX@sonic.net</p> <p>Sent: Wednesday, April 03, 2013 1:29 PM</p> <p>To: Nicolie Bolster</p> <p>Subject: RE: utility rate hikes</p> <p>Hello,</p> <p>Oh, absolutely. The only healthcare that has helped me in any way is out of pocket (acupuncture, chiropractic, orthodonture, and other complementary therapies). As a single mother with extremely limited income due to disability, I have to make choices every single day about what to prioritize. I spend a tremendous percentage of our family's income monthly on the combination of care and related supplements, and so have every month to choose how to dole out the limited funds. Often, I have chosen not to run the air purifier as much as we actually need, due to Multiple Chemical Sensitivity we all four suffer originally due to pesticide poisoning, and most often do not use any heater at all. That has resulted in colds many times, in spite of our wearing layers. We live in a mobile home which is only partially insulated and with two old windows which actually have huge gaps vertically between the single pane "panels" of the windows. I haven't the money to have them replaced, and was firmly reprimanded by the head of a county agency for even applying years later again for a grant for "minor home repairs", a grant which I'd gotten in the past to get the completely leaky roof replaced.</p> <p>Some people would fault me for not using a heater all the time; another would fault me for not using the air purifier for 24 hours a day and 7 days a week; still another would fault me for having chiropractic or acupuncture or other care, or using supplements. How does one make choices when each is needed to try to maintain even our very faulty health? We should not have to make choices. My health has dramatically worsened over some years, in spite of having removed my family from the Sonoma Valley and the daily source of toxic pesticides in massive quantities all around us. The worsening is in direct relationship to our worsening money situation. Each rent raise, each utility hike, each rise in food and gas costs has literally removed access to the care we need which helped at least to keep some symptoms from escalating. Effects on my kids have</p>

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		<p>completely cut into and compromised their college experiences as they cannot move through at the rates they might have were they well, and of course that is expected to have a very negative financial impact on them shortterm and quite possibly longterm. They need care, and need air purifiers on 24 hours a day, and the heaters on, not off, on cold nights and mornings, and need not to have the use of those mean they do not have the supportive healthcare they need. I wonder what their lives would be had they access to all these without worry. As I wait for checks to arrive, often I have \$1 or \$2 or \$5 in the bank and often I have nothing to speak of in my wallet.</p> <p>And now that we have received a rent raise for July of another \$31.40 I will have to make yet more choices out of the \$2047 (plus \$68 in food stamps we have received last few months as I finally had to apply, out of desperation) a month on which four of us live. And as child support for two of my kids will disappear in the not-to-distant future it is all the more scary to imagine utility rate hikes, especially knowing that PG&E receives public money upon public money. I cannot afford to buy many prepared foods, cooking most from scratch, often turning to electric appliances vs. the propane stove, having to calculate constantly which might be cheaper to use for which purposes, and cook great quantities of beans or whatever at once in order to save on cooking costs. I already do that picking and choosing daily.</p> <p>And in terms of the medical bill question, when I did have to use the ER at San Leandro Hospital some years ago, their "charity" aspect was made unavailable to me until I got the County Board of Supervisors involved! Even the \$400 I had paid along the way before getting them involved since I was getting so many threats in the mail (which then was all I paid after BOS involvement) directly removed \$400 of healthcare we would normally otherwise have had. That is how our lives function; a higher bill here directly leads to loss of care there.</p> <p>Rate hikes are dramatically scary for me, especially as I have read about dramatic increases in cost once "smart" meters have been installed. I appreciate any work done for us all to keep utility companies in check.</p> <p>Sincerely,</p> <p>[Identifying information redacted]</p>
7	San Francisco, CA PG&E Customer	<p>In an email, the respondent wrote:</p> <p>From: XXXXXXXX Sent: Tuesday, April 16, 2013 6:30 PM To: nbolster@dredf.org Subject: P G and E bills/change in rates-personal story</p>

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		<p>Hello Nicolie,</p> <p>My name is J. K. I received a notice that you were interested in hearing stories from families who may be effected by rate changes in their utilities.</p> <p>The notice also stated that you would like to know what percentage our electricity bill was of our income.</p> <p>We have a child who has Rett Syndrome, a genetic disorder in which the person has <u>many</u> difficulties including the inability to control their body temperature. She is severely disabled.</p> <p>We live in San Francisco where mostly it is on the cooler side temperature-wise.</p> <p>We have to have the heat on whenever our daughter is in the house.</p> <p>During the especially cold months, our heating bill has risen to almsot [sic] 300 dollars in one month! We did, for awhile, have to go on a special payment plan to afford the monthly payments.</p> <p>Mostly, our P G and E bill stays around 130-150.00 per month. My husband makes \$4,000.month and we receive IHSS--a state benefit for our daughter. Our mortgage, property taxes, and insurance total \$3300.--per month</p> <p>I would say that the electricity bills are a part of a combination of high costs in basic utility bills in San Francisco that really are hard for our family.</p> <p>It is the combination of our mortgage and property taxes, gas for transporting our daughter in a large van, water bills for submerging her in a bath when the heat isn't warming her up fast enough, water for laundering her bibs and clothes, etc., garbage bills, etc. We do not keep credit card balances, and when our daughter [sic] is not here, we turn off the heater all together.</p> <p>We are a very frugal family we rarely go out to eat, we cook at home, the kids bring their lunch every day we do not have smart phones or iphones or even cable--we use our local foodbank--but still, there are times when we cannot afford our basic bills.</p> <p>I am not sure if this helps but I thought I would let you know.</p> <p>Thank You,</p>

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		[Identifying information redacted]
8	Sacramento, CA May be SMUD customer	<p>In an email, the respondent wrote:</p> <p>From: XXXXXXXX Sent: Thursday, April 11, 2013 3:30 PM To: nbolster@dredf.org Subject: CPUC</p> <p>Hi,</p> <p>This is S. G. I oppose California public Utilities Commision [sic] to increase utility costs for low-income consumers. Mine is struggling with average income but as for low income consumers, there is no way to let the changes that harm low income consumers with disability. People with disability have a hard time finding a good job with better income. I am deaf, mid 40's and female with average income of \$35,000. I have upper respiratory problems so I depend on having AC so I can breathe easily. I cannot afford a high bill of using electricity so when I had to limit the use of it and it impacted on my breathing issues. I went to ER three times in a year. I had to pay for medicine for it. I'm in favor of clean environment and conserve energy but I had to use AC due to my health. I had struggled to pay the bills but managing with low costs of food, limit of use transportation. The average monthly bill is about \$250-\$400...</p> <p>Thank you for taking your time and consideration,</p> <p>[Identifying information redacted]</p>