

From: Erik Braun [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, March 12, 2026 11:51 AM
To: PUC-PUC <PUC@state.sd.us>
Subject: [EXT] Docket EL26-003

Hello -

Please find my comments concerning **EL26-003 - In the Matter of the Application of Black Hills Power, Inc. dba Black Hills Energy for Authority to Increase Rates For its Utility Service in South Dakota** below:

I appreciate very much the service and community commitment that Black Hills Energy and its' employees provide in western South Dakota. But I object to the 25% proposed rate increase by Black Hills Energy without more view of their billing practices, fees, and overall risk shifting to consumers. Since moving back to the area in 2005 and investing here in both residential and commercial real estate over the years, I have started to see a common trend to the electrical energy bills I deal with at my properties. Between all of them, I have close to 30 meters on my buildings in Rapid City, split between residential and commercial users. I am concerned about the proposed increase from Black Hills Energy because while they claim the increase is the first in several years, my anecdotal experience is that by changing their billing methods they have kept their bill levels up by changing how they bill for power.

I don't have the records to present this as a fact - but as I have made changes across properties to become more energy efficient, the monthly bills have not in general declined. Instead I have noticed that while the cost of "Energy Supply" on my bills has been flat or gone down, while the cost of "Delivery and Distribution" has gone up.

I hope the PUC will take a close look at whether they truly need an increase in energy rates if they have already instituted a de facto increase by upping the fees charged to customers just for the right to get energy at their properties.

I also hope the PUC will take in to account the fees charged to consumers outside of the energy and delivery. I would point the PUC to the \$20 charge Black Hills Energy institutes any time a meter is transferred to a new account. I am subject to this charge every time a tenant moves out of a property and the service goes back in my name. I assume every time

a new tenant moves in to a unit and takes over the electrical account from me they are charged the same. That \$20 charge has to end up being hugely more than the actual administrative cost, especially since the process is mostly automated at this point. 25 years ago or so the PUC allowed utilities to require separate meters for apartment buildings.... if the PUC is now going to allow BHE to continue to charge fees for meter swaps, charge high rates for delivery of power without concern on actual use of power, and now increase the rates by 25%, I would hope they would at least start to consider some options like allowing apartment buildings to master meter again and provide power to tenants as part of the rent.

Lastly, and maybe not directly connected to the rate increase, but we in western SD have been dealing with the threat this year of Black Hills Energy turning off our power during high wind events due to wildfire risk. This puts all of consumers' properties at risk of unanticipated threats due to losing power over the winter when freezing temperatures are hard to handle without massive personal investment in backup power at every property, not mention just day to day risk of disruption to our homes and businesses. This proposed rate increase coming on the heels of this threat of intentional power outages really just makes me feel as a consumer that Black Hills Energy intends to transfer 100% of the risk to the consumer, when we are absolutely unprepared to handle it. If the PUC is going to agree to this risk shift to the consumers of western South Dakota - please include with changes that allow us consumers to produce our own electricity at our own discretion and not be penalized on the rates we pay Black Hills Energy to use their supply as back up. If consumers have to evaluate and take on the risk of unpredictable outages occurring at Black Hills Energy's discretion, BHE should have to partially subsidize the costs of those consumers installing backup power sources and choosing to use those sources to lower their BHE consumption.

Thank you for your consideration.

Erik Alan Braun

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Rapid City

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