

**From:** Judy Baenen [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Sunday, April 12, 2026 7:35 PM  
**To:** PUC-PUC <[PUC@state.sd.us](mailto:PUC@state.sd.us)>  
**Subject:** [EXT] Docket EL26-003 Public Comment – Judy Baenen

*Dear Commissioners and Staff:*

*I am writing as a long-time Black Hills Energy customer and resident of Lead, South Dakota, to respectfully oppose the proposed rate increase in Docket EL26-003. As a retiree on a fixed income, I would be significantly impacted by the approximately 25% residential rate hike, which the company estimates would raise average monthly bills by roughly \$25 (or about \$300 annually). For households living on limited retirement income in a smaller community like Lead, this represents a substantial and difficult-to-absorb financial burden that could force reductions in other essential spending.*

*South Dakota retirees have faced several consecutive years of cost-of-living adjustments that have not kept pace with inflation, and a large, sudden utility rate increase would compound these pressures. I ask the Commission to give strong weight to the disproportionate impact on senior citizens and other fixed-income households when determining whether the proposed rates are just and reasonable.*

*Black Hills Energy has not requested a base-rate increase since 2014—more than twelve years—during which time costs and infrastructure needs have risen. While some adjustment may be warranted after such a long period, a single 25% jump feels abrupt and especially challenging for residential customers. By comparison, the recent Otter Tail Power rate case in South Dakota was approved at a much more modest level of approximately 7.7% (about \$9 per month for the average residential customer). This demonstrates that more measured approaches are feasible while still allowing utilities to recover prudent costs.*

*I respectfully request that the Commission and its staff thoroughly examine whether all of the proposed infrastructure investments—totaling hundreds of millions of dollars—are necessary and prudent at this time. Are there opportunities to prioritize or phase the most critical reliability and safety projects? Could some costs be mitigated through enhanced energy efficiency programs, federal grants, or other offsets? Rigorous scrutiny of the company's cost estimates and alternatives will help ensure that ratepayers are not shouldering unnecessary burdens.*

*Should the Commission determine that some revenue increase is justified, I urge consideration of customer-friendly alternatives that ease the transition. These could include phasing in the rate changes gradually over multiple years, implementing tiered*

*rates or bill credits that provide targeted relief to lower-usage and low-income households, or establishing specific assistance programs or offsets for retirees and fixed-income residents. Greater promotion of energy-efficiency rebates and conservation incentives could also help customers mitigate the impact of higher rates by reducing their consumption.*

*Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments and for your important work in balancing utility needs with the affordability concerns of South Dakota ratepayers. I respectfully request that these points be made part of the official record in Docket EL26-003.*

Sincerely,  
Judy Baenen

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Lead, SD 57754

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