
DIGEST

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HB 965 Reengrossed

2024 Regular Session

Hilferty

Abstract: Provides relative to billing for services provided by the sewerage and water board of New Orleans.

Proposed law requires the sewerage and water board of New Orleans (the board) to present every residential customer with the option of paying a fixed monthly rate for services. Requires the board to notify each customer, within 120 days of the effectiveness of proposed law, of the option for fixed rate billing and the amount he would pay each month. Provides that the fixed rate applies until an automated meter is installed and operable at his residence.

Proposed law provides for an arbitration program applicable to customers who dispute their bills. Requires the following with respect to the program:

- (1) The legislative auditor and the New Orleans inspector general shall appoint two arbiters for each councilmanic district in New Orleans, subject to confirmation by the city council. One arbiter from each district shall be appointed to serve on the residential arbitration team, and one arbiter from each district shall be appointed to serve on the commercial arbitration team.
- (2) If a customer disputes a monthly bill or the fixed monthly rate offered pursuant to proposed law, his case shall be referred to the appropriate arbitration team.
- (3) Requires each arbitration team to hold regularly scheduled appointment days at a public facility in each of the councilmanic districts to discuss cases with particular customers. Requires that at least one member of the team meet with each customer in a private location at the public facility and review the evidence pertaining to the customer's dispute.
- (4) Based on the review, the arbiter shall determine whether the bill or fixed rate amount is appropriate and, if not, what the appropriate amount or rate is.
- (5) If the arbiter determines that the appropriate bill or rate amount is lower than what has been submitted to the customer, he shall notify the board, and the board shall lower the amount or rate to that which the arbiter has determined is appropriate.
- (6) Provides that the customer may appeal the arbiter's determination to the city council as otherwise provided by present law.

Effective upon signature of governor or lapse of time for gubernatorial action.

(Adds R.S. 33:4159.3)

Summary of Amendments Adopted by House

The House Floor Amendments to the engrossed bill:

1. Make arbitration provisions applicable to commercial customers and provide for residential and commercial arbitration teams.
2. Require that the teams hold regularly scheduled appointment days.
3. Change the basis of the fixed rate offered to residential customers from recent bill amounts to water usage as indicated by recent meter readings.
4. Require fixed rates to be offered within 120 days of effectiveness of proposed law.
5. Add special effective date.