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SENATE BILL NO. 762

Offered January 21, 2022

A BILL to amend and reenact § 56-577 of the Code of Virginia, relating to electric utilities; retail competition; renewable energy.

Patron—Suetterlein

Referred to Committee on Commerce and Labor

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**1. That § 56-577 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:****§ 56-577. Schedule for transition to retail competition; Commission authority; exemptions; pilot programs.**

A. Retail competition for the purchase and sale of electric energy shall be subject to the following provisions:

1. Each incumbent electric utility owning, operating, controlling, or having an entitlement to transmission capacity shall join or establish a regional transmission entity, which entity may be an independent system operator, to which such utility shall transfer the management and control of its transmission system, subject to the provisions of § 56-579.

2. The generation of electric energy shall be subject to regulation as specified in this chapter.

3. Subject to the provisions of subdivisions 4 and 5, only individual retail customers of electric energy within the Commonwealth, regardless of customer class, whose demand during the most recent calendar year exceeded five megawatts but did not exceed one percent of the customer's incumbent electric utility's peak load during the most recent calendar year unless such customer had noncoincident peak demand in excess of 90 megawatts in calendar year 2006 or any year thereafter, shall be permitted to purchase electric energy from any supplier of electric energy licensed to sell retail electric energy within the Commonwealth, except for any incumbent electric utility other than the incumbent electric utility serving the exclusive service territory in which such a customer is located, subject to the following conditions:

a. If such customer does not purchase electric energy from licensed suppliers, such customer shall purchase electric energy from its incumbent electric utility.

b. Except as provided in subdivision 4, the demands of individual retail customers may not be aggregated or combined for the purpose of meeting the demand limitations of this provision, any other provision of this chapter to the contrary notwithstanding. For the purposes of this section, each noncontiguous site will nevertheless constitute an individual retail customer even though one or more such sites may be under common ownership of a single person.

c. If such customer does purchase electric energy from licensed suppliers after the expiration or termination of capped rates, it shall not thereafter be entitled to purchase electric energy from the incumbent electric utility without giving five years' advance written notice of such intention to such utility, except where such customer demonstrates to the Commission, after notice and opportunity for hearing, through clear and convincing evidence that its supplier has failed to perform, or has anticipatorily breached its duty to perform, or otherwise is about to fail to perform, through no fault of the customer, and that such customer is unable to obtain service at reasonable rates from an alternative supplier. If, as a result of such proceeding, the Commission finds it in the public interest to grant an exemption from the five-year notice requirement, such customer may thereafter purchase electric energy at the costs of such utility, as determined by the Commission pursuant to subdivision 3 d hereof, for the remainder of the five-year notice period, after which point the customer may purchase electric energy from the utility under rates, terms and conditions determined pursuant to § 56-585.1. However, such customer shall be allowed to individually purchase electric energy from the utility under rates, terms, and conditions determined pursuant to § 56-585.1 if, upon application by such customer, the Commission finds that neither such customer's incumbent electric utility nor retail customers of such utility that do not choose to obtain electric energy from alternate suppliers will be adversely affected in a manner contrary to the public interest by granting such petition. In making such determination, the Commission shall take into consideration, without limitation, the impact and effect of any and all other previously approved petitions of like type with respect to such incumbent electric utility. Any customer that returns to purchase electric energy from its incumbent electric utility, before or after expiration of the five-year notice period, shall be subject to minimum stay periods equal to those prescribed by the Commission pursuant to subdivision C 1.

d. The costs of serving a customer that has received an exemption from the five-year notice

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59 requirement under subdivision 3 c hereof shall be the market-based costs of the utility, including (i) the
60 actual expenses of procuring such electric energy from the market, (ii) additional administrative and
61 transaction costs associated with procuring such energy, including, but not limited to, costs of
62 transmission, transmission line losses, and ancillary services, and (iii) a reasonable margin as determined
63 pursuant to the provisions of subdivision A 2 of § 56-585.1. The methodology established by the
64 Commission for determining such costs shall ensure that neither utilities nor other retail customers are
65 adversely affected in a manner contrary to the public interest.

66 4. Two or more individual nonresidential retail customers of electric energy within the
67 Commonwealth, whose individual demand during the most recent calendar year did not exceed five
68 megawatts, may petition the Commission for permission to aggregate or combine their demands, for the
69 purpose of meeting the demand limitations of subdivision 3, so as to become qualified to purchase
70 electric energy from any supplier of electric energy licensed to sell retail electric energy within the
71 Commonwealth under the conditions specified in subdivision 3. The Commission may, after notice and
72 opportunity for hearing, approve such petition if it finds that:

73 a. Neither such customers' incumbent electric utility nor retail customers of such utility that do not
74 choose to obtain electric energy from alternate suppliers will be adversely affected in a manner contrary
75 to the public interest by granting such petition. In making such determination, the Commission shall take
76 into consideration, without limitation, the impact and effect of any and all other previously approved
77 petitions of like type with respect to such incumbent electric utility; and

78 b. Approval of such petition is consistent with the public interest.

79 If such petition is approved, all customers whose load has been aggregated or combined shall
80 thereafter be subject in all respects to the provisions of subdivision 3 and shall be treated as a single,
81 individual customer for the purposes of said subdivision. In addition, the Commission shall impose
82 reasonable periodic monitoring and reporting obligations on such customers to demonstrate that they
83 continue, as a group, to meet the demand limitations of subdivision 3. If the Commission finds, after
84 notice and opportunity for hearing, that such group of customers no longer meets the above demand
85 limitations, the Commission may revoke its previous approval of the petition, or take such other actions
86 as may be consistent with the public interest.

87 5. Individual retail customers of electric energy within the Commonwealth, regardless of customer
88 class, shall be permitted:

89 a. To purchase electric energy provided 100 percent from renewable energy from any supplier of
90 electric energy licensed to sell retail electric energy within the Commonwealth, other than any
91 incumbent electric utility that is not the incumbent electric utility serving the exclusive service territory
92 in which such a customer is located; if the incumbent electric utility serving the exclusive service
93 territory does not offer an approved tariff for electric energy provided 100 percent from renewable
94 energy; and

95 b. To continue purchasing renewable energy pursuant to the terms of a power purchase agreement in
96 effect on the date there is filed with the Commission a tariff for the incumbent electric utility that serves
97 the exclusive service territory in which the customer is located to offer electric energy provided 100
98 percent from renewable energy, for the duration of such agreement.

99 6. To the extent that an incumbent electric utility has elected as of February 1, 2019, the Fixed
100 Resource Requirement alternative as a Load Serving Entity in the PJM Region and continues to make
101 such election and is therefore required to obtain capacity for all load and expected load growth in its
102 service area, any customer of a utility subject to that requirement that purchases energy pursuant to
103 subdivision 3 or 4 from a supplier licensed to sell retail electric energy within the Commonwealth shall
104 continue to pay its incumbent electric utility for the non-fuel generation capacity and transmission
105 related costs incurred by the incumbent electric utility in order to meet the customer's capacity
106 obligations, pursuant to the incumbent electric utility's standard tariff that has been approved by and is
107 on file with the Commission. In the case of such customer, the advance written notice period established
108 in subdivisions 3 c and d shall be three years. This subdivision shall not apply to the customers of
109 licensed suppliers that (i) had an agreement with a licensed supplier entered into before February 1,
110 2019, or (ii) had aggregation petitions pending before the Commission prior to January 1, 2019, unless
111 and until any customer referenced in clause (i) or (ii) has returned to purchase electric energy from its
112 incumbent electric utility, pursuant to the provisions of subdivision 3 or 4, and is receiving electric
113 energy from such incumbent electric utility.

114 7. A tariff for one or more classes of residential customers filed with the Commission for approval
115 by a cooperative on or after July 1, 2010, shall be deemed to offer a tariff for electric energy provided
116 100 percent from renewable energy if it provides undifferentiated electric energy and the cooperative
117 retires a quantity of renewable energy certificates equal to 100 percent of the electric energy provided
118 pursuant to such tariff. A tariff for one or more classes of nonresidential customers filed with the
119 Commission for approval by a cooperative on or after July 1, 2012, shall be deemed to offer a tariff for
120 electric energy provided 100 percent from renewable energy if it provides undifferentiated electric

energy and the cooperative retires a quantity of renewable energy certificates equal to 100 percent of the electric energy provided pursuant to such tariff. For purposes of this section, "renewable energy certificate" means, with respect to cooperatives, a tradable commodity or instrument issued by a regional transmission entity or affiliate or successor thereof in the United States that validates the generation of electricity from renewable energy sources or that is certified under a generally recognized renewable energy certificate standard. One renewable energy certificate equals 1,000 kWh or one MWh of electricity generated from renewable energy. A cooperative offering electric energy provided 100 percent from renewable energy pursuant to this subdivision that involves the retirement of renewable energy certificates shall disclose to its retail customers who express an interest in purchasing energy pursuant to such tariff (i) that the renewable energy is comprised of the retirement of renewable energy certificates, (ii) the identity of the entity providing the renewable energy certificates, and (iii) the sources of renewable energy being offered.

B. The Commission shall promulgate such rules and regulations as may be necessary to implement the provisions of this section.

C. 1. By January 1, 2002, the Commission shall promulgate regulations establishing whether and, if so, for what minimum periods, customers who request service from an incumbent electric utility pursuant to subsection D of § 56-582 or a default service provider, after a period of receiving service from other suppliers of electric energy, shall be required to use such service from such incumbent electric utility or default service provider, as determined to be in the public interest by the Commission.

2. Subject to (i) the availability of capped rate service under § 56-582, and (ii) the transfer of the management and control of an incumbent electric utility's transmission assets to a regional transmission entity after approval of such transfer by the Commission under § 56-579, retail customers of such utility (a) purchasing such energy from licensed suppliers and (b) otherwise subject to minimum stay periods prescribed by the Commission pursuant to subdivision 1, shall nevertheless be exempt from any such minimum stay obligations by agreeing to purchase electric energy at the market-based costs of such utility or default providers after a period of obtaining electric energy from another supplier. Such costs shall include (i) the actual expenses of procuring such electric energy from the market, (ii) additional administrative and transaction costs associated with procuring such energy, including, but not limited to, costs of transmission, transmission line losses, and ancillary services, and (iii) a reasonable margin. The methodology of ascertaining such costs shall be determined and approved by the Commission after notice and opportunity for hearing and after review of any plan filed by such utility to procure electric energy to serve such customers. The methodology established by the Commission for determining such costs shall be consistent with the goals of (a) promoting the development of effective competition and economic development within the Commonwealth as provided in subsection A of § 56-596, and (b) ensuring that neither incumbent utilities nor retail customers that do not choose to obtain electric energy from alternate suppliers are adversely affected.

3. Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection D of § 56-582 and subsection C of § 56-585, however, any such customers exempted from any applicable minimum stay periods as provided in subdivision 2 shall not be entitled to purchase retail electric energy thereafter from their incumbent electric utilities, or from any distributor required to provide default service under subsection B of § 56-585, at the capped rates established under § 56-582, unless such customers agree to satisfy any minimum stay period then applicable while obtaining retail electric energy at capped rates.

4. The Commission shall promulgate such rules and regulations as may be necessary to implement the provisions of this subsection, which rules and regulations shall include provisions specifying the commencement date of such minimum stay exemption program.