

**PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
1325 G STREET, N.W., SUITE 800  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005**

**ORDER**

**September 26, 2019**

**GENERAL DOCKET NO. 2019-03, COMMISSION INQUIRY INTO THE JULY 27, 2019,  
INTERRUPTION OF ELECTRIC DISTRIBUTION SERVICES OCCURRING AT THE  
POTOMAC ELECTRIC POWER COMPANY'S FLORIDA AVENUE SUBSTATION,  
Order No. 20228**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

1. By this Order, and in accordance with Sections 34-903 and 34-907 of the D.C. Code<sup>1</sup> and Section 101.4 of Title 15 of the District of Columbia Municipal Regulations (“DCMR”),<sup>2</sup> the Public Service Commission of the District of Columbia (“Commission”) hereby initiates an inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the July 27, 2019, interruption of Potomac Electric Power Company’s (“Pepco’s”) electric distribution services to customers served by the Florida Avenue substation in the District of Columbia (“District”), and directs Pepco to appear at a legislative style (informational only) hearing as set forth in this Order.

**II. BACKGROUND**

2. On July 27, 2019, Pepco experienced a prolonged loss of power to a substantial number of District customers.<sup>3</sup> Approximately 21,000 customers<sup>4</sup> located across a wide swath of Northwest Washington lost power beginning at 2:30 p.m. Power was not restored to all customers until approximately 2:48 a.m. the following day.<sup>5</sup> Press reports stated that among those affected were MedStar Washington Hospital Center, Howard University Hospital, and Children’s National Hospital.<sup>6</sup> Press reports also indicated that the District of Columbia Fire Department received

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<sup>1</sup> D.C. Code § 34-903 (2001 Ed.); § 34-907 (2001 Ed.).

<sup>2</sup> 15 DCMR § 101.4 (1989).

<sup>3</sup> We note that this was a "Blue-Sky" outage, not the result of a storm or direct weather-driven event. It did, however, occur during the back-end of a prolonged heat wave.

<sup>4</sup> Although the initial press reports were that 39,000 customers were affected, Pepco clarified in a data response that only 21,175 customers were affected by this outage. See Docket No. SO2019, Pepco’s Response to Commission Staff’s Data Request No.1-24, dated August 12, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Stark, Cortlynn, *Power Restored After Outage Affected 39,000 in Northwest D.C. on Saturday*, The Washington Post (July 28, 2019); Martner, Zeke and Simon, Madeleine, <https://wtop.com/dc/2019/07/tens-of-thousands-experiencing-power-outages-in-northwest-dc/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://wtop.com/dc/2019/07/tens-of-thousands-experiencing-power-outages-in-northwest-dc/>.

numerous calls from people stuck in elevators during the first part of the outage.<sup>7</sup> According to the press, two of the city's cooling centers — the Banneker and Columbia Heights community centers — closed because of the power failure.<sup>8</sup>

### III. DISCUSSION

3. Section 34-1101 of the District of Columbia Official Code (“D.C. Code”) requires every public utility doing business within the District to furnish service and facilities reasonably safe and adequate and in all respects just and reasonable.<sup>9</sup> In view of the prolonged electric outage suffered by Pepco customers as a result of the Florida Avenue substation power failure, including several District hospitals and cooling centers, the Commission deems it necessary to consider, among other things, the cause of the power outages in the area served by the Florida Avenue substation, whether Pepco is providing consistently safe and adequate service in the Florida Avenue area, and whether power outage restoration efforts have been sufficient.

4. Accordingly, the Commission sets this matter for a legislative-style, informational, public hearing on the date and time set forth below. We direct senior Pepco representatives to appear at this hearing to discuss the Company's response to the July 27<sup>th</sup> power outage and to provide details concerning the cause(s) of the outage and Pepco's restoration efforts, including the number and types of customers affected by the outages. Pepco shall also discuss any corrective action plans (both short and long term), and lessons learned. Additionally, the Pepco representatives shall be prepared to respond to questions from the Commission concerning those matters. As this is a legislative-style, informational hearing, and not an evidentiary hearing, no other persons will be permitted to present statements or submit information or question Pepco at the hearing.

#### **THEREFORE, IT IS ORDERED THAT:**

5. The Commission hereby **OPENS** an inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the July 27, 2019, interruption of Pepco's distribution services to customers served by the Florida Avenue substation in the District; and

6. The Commission will convene a legislative-style, informational, public hearing on November 6, 2019, at 2:00 p.m. in the Commission Hearing Room, 1325 G Street, N.W., Suite 800, Washington, D.C. 20005, for the purpose of receiving information from Pepco regarding this matter, as more specifically set forth in Paragraphs 3 and 4 herein.

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<sup>7</sup> Vigdor, Neil, *Washington, D.C. Power Failure Affects More Than 30,000 Customers*, The New York Times (July 27, 2019); <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/washington-dc-power-outage-pepco-substation-equipment-issue-live-updates-2019-07-27/>.

<sup>8</sup> Vigdor, Neil, *Washington, D.C. Power Failure Affects More Than 30,000 Customers*, The New York Times (July 27, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> D.C. Code § 34-1101 (2001 Ed.).

**A TRUE COPY:**

**BY DIRECTION OF THE COMMISSION:**

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Brinda Westbrook-Sedgwick". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'B' and a long, sweeping tail.

**CHIEF CLERK:**

**BRINDA WESTBROOK-SEDGWICK  
COMMISSION SECRETARY**