IN THE TENNESSEE PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION AT NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

IN RE:)
PETITION OF TENNESSEE-AMERICAN WATER COMPANY FOR APPROVAL OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A REGULATORY ASSET))) Docket No. 20-00126))
DIRECT TEST	

April 30, 2021

- 1 Q1. PLEASE STATE YOUR NAME, BUSINESS ADDRESS, AND OCCUPATION FOR
- THE RECORD.
- 3 A1. My name is Craig C. Cox. My business address is Office of the Tennessee Attorney
- General, John Sevier Building, 500 Dr. Martin L. King, Jr. Boulevard, Nashville, TN
- 5 37243. I am a Financial Analyst employed by the Consumer Advocate Unit in the Financial
- 6 Division of the Tennessee Attorney General's Office ("Consumer Advocate").
- 7 Q2. PLEASE PROVIDE A SUMMARY OF YOUR BACKGROUND AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE.
- 9 A2. I earned a bachelor's degree (B.B.A.) in Finance from Middle Tennessee State University.
- I am also a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) actively licensed in the state of Tennessee
- 11 (#15645). I have twenty-seven years of professional experience, twenty-two of which are
- in private industry and five of which are in government service. Nearly all those years have
- been in analytical roles (financial and operational) at the senior level. Some of the
- responsibilities I have had during those years are as follows: leading the corporate budget
- and quarterly projections processes, along with all associated reporting, for a \$500 million
- global company; financial lead for multiple business units; project and process
- management to include implementation of new and complex accounting pronouncements;
- manager of an accounts-payable operation; and instructor of corporate finance &
- 19 accounting.
- 20 Q3. HAVE YOU PREVIOUSLY PROVIDED TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
- 21 TENNESSEE PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION (TPUC OR THE
- 22 "COMMISSION")?
- 23 **A3.** Yes.
- 24 <u>OVERVIEW</u>
- 25 Q4. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF YOUR TESTIMONY?

A4. The purpose of my testimony is to evaluate and quantify the costs as proposed in the 1 Petition of Tennessee-American Water Company for Approval of the Establishment of a 2 3 Regulatory Asset ("Petition"), TPUC Docket No. 20-00126.¹

WHAT HAS THE COMPANY REQUESTED IN THIS DOCKET? 4 **Q5**.

A5. Specifically, Tennessee-American Water Company (TAWC or the "Company") has 5 requested the establishment of a COVID-19-related regulatory asset comprised of foregone 6 7 late fees and related net expenses. The Company's filing includes Petitioner's Exhibit 1, which details a proposed regulatory asset amount of \$514,465, as of October 2020.² A 8 listing of the Company's proposed deferred asset components is shown in Figure 1 below³: 9

Figure 1 10

	As Filed – Data as of 10/31/20	Update – Data as of 12/31/20
Foregone late payment fees	\$306,626	\$304,140
Costs:		
Incremental operating expenses	62,391	85,267
Uncollectible expense	154,757	116,035
Term loan interest expense	112,090	131,360
Direct offsets:		(A
Travel/conference savings	(121,398)	(135,508)
Total	\$514,465	\$501,294

IDENTIFICATION AND EVALUATION OF THE COMPANY'S PROPOSED COVID-19-RELATED DEFERRED ASSET COMPONENTS

FOREGONE LATE-PAYMENT FEES a.

O6. DESCRIBE THE COMPANY'S PROPOSED FOREGONE LATE-PAYMENT 15 FEES. 16

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¹ Petition of Tennessee-American Water Company for Approval of the Establishment of a Regulatory Asset, Exhibit 1, TPUC Docket No. 20-00126 (November 16, 2020).

² Petition at Exhibit1.

³ Tennessee-American Water Company's Responses to Second Discovery Request of the Consumer Advocate, DR No. 2-04, and file <TAW R CAPDDR2 004 Attachment>, TPUC Docket No. 20-00126 (March 11, 2021).

A6. On March 13, 2020, in response to the Governor's declared state of emergency, the Company voluntarily suspended late fees.⁴ The Company did not reinstate late payment fees until October 1, 2020.⁵ Per the Company's Tariff, a 5% late-payment charge is normally assessed on any bill that remains unpaid fifteen days after a bill is rendered.⁶ The effective date of the late-payment fee is stated on the bill.⁷

Q7. DO YOU AGREE THAT ALL OF THE COMPANY'S PROPOSED FOREGONE LATE-PAYMENT FEES SHOULD BE CONSIDERED FOR DEFERRAL AS A REGULATORY ASSET?

9 A7. No, I do not agree that all the Company's foregone late fees should be included in the proposed regulatory asset. The COVID-19 pandemic has not only impacted the Company, 10 but it has had adverse impacts on the Company's customers.⁸ Notwithstanding Mr. 11 Dittemore's recommendation⁹ that the Company's total proposed COVID-19 pandemic-12 related costs are immaterial to its operations, I recommend the Company be allowed to 13 defer foregone late-payment fees only to the extent that they, when added to those late-14 payment fees charged to customers in 2020, equal the Company's 2017-2019 three-year, 15 pre-pandemic average annual late-payment fees. Figure 2 below shows the maximum 16 amount of foregone late-payment fees, which I recommend the Company be permitted to 17 defer as part of its proposed regulatory asset. Schedule CCC-2 provides the average pre-18 pandemic late-payment fee computation. 19

⁴ Petition at p. 3, \P 7.

⁵ Petition at p. 4 ¶7. See Informational Filing of Tennessee American Water Company ("Tennessee-American Water") Docket No. 20-00047 Related to Measures Taken During the Coronavirus COVID-19 Public Health Emergency, p. 2, TPUC Docket No. 20-00047 (October 14, 2020).

⁶ Tennessee American Water Company, Chattanooga: Rates, Rules, Regulations and Conditions of Water Service, Original Sheet No. 10. A copy of the Company's Tariff is accessible at https://www.amwater.com/tnaw/resources/pdf/Customer-Service/Your-Water-Rates/TRA%20Rates%20and%20Rules.pdf.

⁷ Id

⁸ In its order suspending disconnections, the Commission recognized that the measures taken to contain the public health during the COVID-19 pandemic "has economic consequences on all fronts. As such, many of our <u>most vulnerable households are without work and have little or no income</u>. Businesses, small and large, depend upon basic utility services even as they face potential supply chain problems, a lack of cash-flow, and employees that are unavailable to work. In these challenging times, maintaining safe, reliable, and reasonably priced utility service must remain a priority." *Order Requiring All Jurisdictional Utilities to Suspend Actions to Disconnect Service for Lack of Payment During the State of Public Health Emergency*, p.3, TPUC Docket No. 20-00047 (March 31, 2020).

⁹ Direct Testimony of David N. Dittemore at 3:18 – 5:24, TPUC Docket No. 20-00126 (April 30, 2021).

Figure 2

	Company's 3- year Average Late Pmt Fees (2017-19)	Company's Late Pmt Fees Charged to Customers in 2020	CA's Maximum Recommended Foregone Late Fees
As filed, Mar 20 - Oct 20	\$283,117	\$ 46,246	\$236,871
Mar 20 – Dec 20	342,028	99,256	242,772

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Also, as mentioned in Mr. Dittemore's Testimony, the Company's approved return on equity includes a risk premium for economic downturns and their impacts on revenues.¹⁰ This premium compensates the Company's shareholders for assuming such economic risks

as reductions in late payment fees. For these reasons, I recommend the maximum foregone

late payment fees be calculated by the methodology described here.

b. INCREMENTAL OPERATING EXPENSES

9 Q8. DESCRIBE THE COMPANY'S PROPOSED INCREMENTAL OPERATING 10 EXPENSES.

11 **A8.** The Company claims it has incurred certain expenses directly related to the COVID-19

12 pandemic that it does not incur in a typical year. These expenses include the Company's purchases of PPE and related supplies, cleaning and sanitizing of its facilities, additional customer communications, and related signage. These expenses also include an allocated charge from the Company's parent company for like expenditures. The Company has tracked its direct expenses using a specific tracking number. 11

Q9. DO YOU AGREE THAT THE COMPANY'S INCREMENTAL OPERATING EXPENSES SHOULD BE CONSIDERED FOR DEFERRAL AS A REGULATORY ASSET?

Yes. After reviewing the submitted documentation, I find the Company's expenditures in this category and tracking methodology to be reasonable.

¹¹ Tennessee-American Water Company's Responses to Second Discovery Request of the Consumer Advocate, DR No. 2-7, and Tennessee-American Water Company's Responses to Third Discovery Request of the Consumer Advocate, DR Nos. 3-6, and 3-7.

¹⁰ *Id.* at 5:17-24.

c. UNCOLLECTIBLE EXPENSES

2 Q10. DESCRIBE THE COMPANY'S PROPOSED UNCOLLECTIBLE EXPENSES.

3 **A10.** The Company has proposed that uncollectible expenses above those authorized in its last rate case¹² should be deemed related to the COVID-19 pandemic and, as a result, should be deferred as part of its requested regulatory asset.¹³

6 Q11. DO YOU AGREE THAT THE COMPANY'S UNCOLLECTIBLE EXPENSES 7 SHOULD BE CONSIDERED FOR DEFERRAL AS A REGULATORY ASSET?

No. Given the last rate case is nine years old and the Company has made several acquisitions and divestitures since then, comparing the Company's uncollectible expenses incurred since March 2020 with those of more recent periods would provide a better estimate of uncollectible expenses related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, I recommend using expenses incurred during the three years preceding the pandemic—2017 through 2019—for assessing related uncollectible expenses. In Figure 2 below, I compare the Company's actual 2020 uncollectible expenses for the periods noted to the Company's 2017-2019 three-year average annual uncollectible expenses. Schedule CCC-3 provides the average pre-pandemic uncollectible expense computation.

17 Figure 3

	Company Actual Uncollectible Expenses	Company's 3- year Average Uncollectible Expenses (2017- 19)	CA Estimated Pandemic- related Uncollectible Expense
As filed, Mar 20 - Oct 20	\$473,041	\$466,621	\$6,420
Mar 20 – Dec 20	518,164	546,601	(28,437)

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As can be seen from the comparisons for the selected periods, the Company's recent uncollectible expenses are significantly higher than those included in the Company's last

¹² Order Approving Settlement Agreement, TRA Docket No. 12-00049 (November 20, 2012). One should note that the Tennessee Regulatory Authority, or TRA, is the predecessor agency to the TPUC, just as the Tennessee Public Service Commission predated the TRA. While the nomenclature has changed, the scope and function of these entities has remained essentially the same.

¹³ Tennessee-American Water Company's Responses to First Discovery Request of the Consumer Advocate, DR No. 1-08, and file <TAW_R_CAPDDR1_008 Attachment>, TPUC Docket No. 20-00126 (January 22, 2021).

base rate case. This leads me to conclude that the company's uncollectible expense has risen in recent years, absent the COVID-19 pandemic, and that the Company's approach of comparing 2020 results with the uncollectible expenses authorized in its last rate case does not accurately estimate the pandemic's impact. For the periods shown in Figure 2, the Company's estimated pandemic-related uncollectible expenses are either immaterial (March 2020 through October 2020) or they are less than those experienced over the last three years on average. For these reasons, I do not recommend uncollectible expenses be allowed for regulatory-asset consideration.

d. TERM LOAN INTEREST EXPENSE

- 10 Q12. MR. COX, BOTH YOU AND MR. DITTEMORE DISCUSS THE INTEREST-11 EXPENSE COMPONENT. HOW SHOULD THE COMMISSION VIEW THESE
- 12 **PROPOSALS?**

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- 13 A12. Mr. Dittemore is presenting the primary recommendation regarding interest expense,
- which is that none of the Company's proposed interest expense be considered as a COVID-
- 15 19 pandemic-related cost. 14 I am making an alternative proposal in the event the
- 16 Commission does not adopt Mr. Dittemore's recommendation.
- 17 Q13. DESCRIBE THE COMPANY'S PROPOSED TERM LOAN INTEREST EXPENSE.
- 18 A13. On March 20, 2020, American Water Capital Corporation borrowed \$500 million of an
- approved \$750 million under a twelve-month term loan agreement.¹⁵ The loan was
- obtained in anticipation of liquidity problems associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 21 The loan agreement did not include a prepayment penalty and carried a variable interest
- rate based on the London interbank offer rate (LIBOR) plus a 0.80% margin. ¹⁶ Of the \$500
- million loan proceeds, \$11.8 million was allocated to the Company.
- 24 Q14. DO YOU AGREE THAT THE COMPANY'S TERM-LOAN INTEREST EXPENSE
- 25 SHOULD BE CONSIDERED FOR DEFERRAL AS A REGULATORY ASSET?

¹⁴ Direct Testimony of David N. Dittemore at 6:1 – 7:16

¹⁵ Tennessee-American Water Company's Responses to Second Discovery Request of the Consumer Advocate, DR No. 2-21 and file <TAW_R_CAPDDR2_021_Attachment>.

¹⁶ Id.

A14. If the Commission rejects Mr. Dittemore's recommendation, the term-loan interest expense incurred in April 2020 should be considered, but I do not recommend any interest expense incurred after April 2020 be allowed. On April 29, 2020, less than six weeks after receiving the loan proceeds, American Water Works declared a quarterly dividend increase of 10.0% to its shareholders. In addition, one year later on April 28, 2021, American Water Works declared a second quarterly dividend increase since the advent of the pandemic; this most recent increase was 9.5%. ¹⁷ Given the liquidity required to declare two dividend increases since the beginning of the pandemic, coupled with the lack of a prepayment penalty on the term loan, the interest charges assigned to the Company's customers should have ceased no later than May 1, 2020. Furthermore, the Company has stated that the loan proceeds have not been used. Specifically, the Company stated, "The full balance of the term loan remains as cash for American Water to maintain the enhanced liquidity." ¹⁸ For these reasons, I recommend only the \$17,218 interest incurred during April 2020 be considered for deferral treatment.

e. TRAVEL AND CONFERENCE SAVINGS

16 Q15. DESCRIBE THE COMPANY'S PROPOSED TRAVEL AND CONFERENCE SAVINGS.

A15. The Company proposed travel and conference expense savings as offsets to their claimed incremental pandemic-related costs. Given the travel and safety restrictions followed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Company experienced less travel and conference registrations during 2020. The Company presented the difference between their 2020 travel and conference expenses and those incurred during the same period in 2019 as a representation of its pandemic-related savings.¹⁹

¹⁷Dividends History of American Water Works Company, Street Insider.com, https://www.streetinsider.com/dividend_history.php?q=awk (last visited April 28, 2021).

¹⁸ Tennessee-American Water Company's Responses to Second Discovery Request of the Consumer Advocate, DR No. 2-22.

¹⁹ Tennessee-American Water Company's Responses to First Discovery Request of the Consumer Advocate, DR No. 1-08 and file <TAW_R_CAPDDR1_008 Attachment>.

Q16. DO YOU AGREE THAT THE COMPANY'S TRAVEL AND CONFERENCE SAVINGS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS AN OFFSET TO THE COMPANY'S REQUESTED REGULATORY ASSET?

A16.

Yes, I do. The Company's approach in computing these savings, however, is inconsistent with the approach used by the Company to estimate other pandemic-related expenses. As explained earlier in my testimony, the Company used the uncollectible expenses authorized in its 2012 base rate case as the baseline for computing pandemic-related uncollectible expenses. However, the Company used 2019 levels of travel and conference expenses as its benchmark for computing their pandemic-related expense savings. Consistent with what I proposed for calculating pandemic-related uncollectible expenses, I propose travel and conference savings be computed by comparing the Company's 2020 travel and conference expenses to the averages of those same expenses incurred from 2017 through 2019. In Figure 3 below, I compare the Company's 2020 actual travel and conference expenses for the periods noted to its 2017-2019 pre-pandemic, three-year averages. The difference represents the estimated COVID-19 pandemic-related savings for the Company's travel and conference expenses. Schedule CCC-4 provides the average pre-pandemic travel and conference expense computation.

Figure 4

	Company Actual Travel & Conference Expenses	Company's 3- year Average Travel & Conference Expenses (2017- 19)	CA Estimated Pandemic- related Travel & Conference Savings	Company's Proposed Travel & Conference Savings
As filed, Mar 20 - Oct 20	\$12,135	\$146,363	\$134,228	\$121,398
Mar 20 – Dec 20	19,598	175,169	155,571	135,508

As can be seen from the comparisons, the average three-year, pre-pandemic travel and conference expenses incurred by the Company are higher than those incurred in its lone benchmark year of 2019. For the periods shown in Figure 3, the estimated pandemic-related travel and conference expense savings are at least 10% higher than the savings proposed by the Company. Since using data from more than one recent period provides a better representation of the Company's typical pre-pandemic expenses, I recommend the Company's COVID-19 pandemic-related expense savings be computed using average travel and conference expenses incurred from 2017 through 2019 as the benchmark.

- 1 Q17. CAN YOU SUMMARIZE THE INCREMENTAL COSTS YOU BELIEVE
- 2 SHOULD BE SUBJECT TO CONSIDERATION BY THE COMMISSION FOR
- 3 **DEFERRED ASSET TREATMENT?**
- 4 A17. Yes. Schedule CCC-1 sets forth the calculation of incremental COVID-19 pandemic costs
- 5 through December 2020 for the reasons stated earlier in my testimony.
- 6 Q18. WHAT IS THE CONSUMER ADVOCATE'S RECOMMENDATION
- 7 CONCERNING THE RECOVERY OF THESE INCREMENTAL COSTS?
- 8 A18. Mr. Dittemore is supporting the overall Consumer Advocate recommendation on the
- 9 appropriate treatment of the incremental COVID-19 pandemic costs that I have identified
- in my testimony.
- 11 O19. DOES THIS COMPLETE YOUR TESTIMONY?
- 12 A19. Yes, however I reserve the right to supplement my testimony should new information arise.





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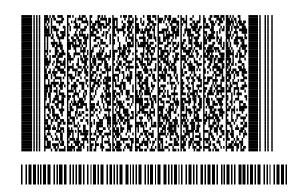
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IN THE TENNESSEE PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION AT NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

IN RE: PETITION OF TENNESSEE- AMERICAN WATER COMPANY FOR APPROVAL OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A REGULATORY ASSET)))) DOCKET NO. 20-00126))
AFFIDA	AVIT
I, Craig C Cox, on behalf of the General's Office hereby certify that the attached E above-referenced case and the opinion of the Const	Direct Testimony represents my opinion in the
Sworn to and subscribed before me	
Thisday of, 2021 04/28/2021	1
NOTARY PUBLIC My Commission Expires:	TERRA ALLEN Tennessee Notary Public Online Notary Public Hickman County, State Of Tennessee My Commission Expires Sep 28, 2022

Tennessee American Water Company Docket No. 20-00126 Request for COVID-19 Accounting Deferral

Schedule CCC-1

Summary of COVID-19 Costs per Consumer Advocate (CA)

Item	as of	VC Balance f 10/31/2020 - Oct 2020)	TAV as of	Jpdated /C Balance f 12/31/2020 - Dec 2020)	CA	Adjustments	CA Pandemic- Related Maximum Recommended Costs as of 12/31/2020 (Mar - Dec 2020)	
Foregone Late Payment Fees	\$	306,626	\$	304,140	\$	(61,368) (a)	\$	242,772
Incremental Operating Expenses		62,391		85,267		- , , ,		85,267
Uncollectible Expense		154,757		116,035		(116,035) (b))	-
Term Loan Interest Expense		112,090		131,360		(114,142)		17,218
Travel Conference Savings		(121,398)		(135,508)		(20,063) (c)		(155,571)
Total	\$	514,465	\$	501,294	\$	(311,608)	\$	189,686

⁽a) Schedule CCC-2

⁽b) Schedule CCC-3

⁽c) Schedule CCC-4

Tennessee-American Water Company Docket No. 20-00126 Request for COVID-19 Accounting Deferral

Schedule CCC-2

COVID-19 Foregone Late Payment Fees per Consumer Advocate For the 10-Month Period March through December

					2020	
				Charged to	Foregone Late	Total Late
Month	2017	2018	2019	Customers	Fees	Payment Fees
Mar	\$ 32,764 \$	32,222 \$	36,434	\$ (11,486)	\$ 28,580	\$ 17,094
Apr	24,338	35,868	30,042	(67,942)	67,405	(537)
May	31,870	33,830	29,275	(41,785)	41,421	(364)
Jun	33,999	33,710	29,638	137,394	41,071	178,465
Jul	38,108	47,504	37,387	153	46,488	46,641
Aug	42,053	43,836	35,990	29	39,180	39,209
Sep	30,947	30,044	28,609	(507)	42,480	41,973
Oct	42,012	50,800	38,070	30,391	-	30,391
Nov	20,087	29,141	30,488	24,400	(2,486)	21,914
Dec	 33,647	32,077	31,295	28,610	-	28,610
Mar - Dec Totals	\$ 329,825 \$	369,032 \$	327,228	\$ 99,256	\$ 304,140	\$ 403,396
	20:	17 10 Average C	242 020			

2017-19 Average \$ 342,028

2017-19 Mar - Dec Average Total 10-Month Late Payment Fees	\$ 342,028
Less Mar - Dec 2020 Late Payment Fees Charged to Customers	(99,256)
Balance of Average Total 10-Month Late Fees Not Charged in 2020	\$ 242,772

Consumer Advocate's Maximum Recommended
Foregone Late Payment Fees for Regulatory Asset

\$ 242,772

Tennessee-American Water Company Docket No. 20-00126 Request for COVID-19 Accounting Deferral

Schedule CCC-3

COVID-19 Uncollectible Expenses per Consumer Advocate For the 10-Month Period March through December

Month		2017		2018		2019		2020	
Mar	\$	37,767	\$	64,413	\$	50,259	\$	67,319	
Apr		74,204		57,897		20,317		33,183	
May		38,525		55,037		44,986		44,862	
Jun		81,949		89,116		4,001		64,282	
Jul		92,896		61,495		47,659		51,107	
Aug		16,906		45,017		48,369		99,418	
Sep		78,181		89,035		52,211		89,125	
Oct		69,758		87,913		91,953		23,744	
Nov		38,248		43,819		23,816		10,057	
Dec		42,673		43,014		48,370		35,066	
Mar - Dec Totals	\$	571,107	\$	636,756	\$	431,941	\$	518,164	
			20	17-19 Average	\$	546,601			
Mar - Dec 2020 10-r	nontl	n Uncollectib	le E	xpenses			\$	518,164	
2017-19 Mar - Dec A		546,601							
Estimated Pandemic-related Uncollectible Expenses								(28,438)	
Consumer Advocate's Maximum Recommended									
Uncollectible Expe	\$	-							

Tennessee-American Water Company Docket No. 20-00126 Request for COVID-19 Accounting Deferral

Schedule CCC-4
COVID-19 Travel & Conference Savings per Consumer Advocate
For the 10-Month Period March through December

Month		2017		2018		2019		2020
Mar	\$	28,745	\$	14,884	\$	21,636	\$	4,548
Apr		27,294		18,627		23,279		(4,066)
May		22,917		15,610		8,055		3,524
Jun		14,348		18,585		10,053		1,437
Jul		26,972		22,961		8,561		1,175
Aug		15,886		30,753		12,329		(1,293)
Sep		11,221		17,970		12,810		4,391
Oct		13,973		8,146		33,473		2,418
Nov		8,163		23,489		8,721		3,585
Dec		14,790		20,111		11,146		3,879
Mar - Dec Totals	\$	184,308	\$	191,136	\$	150,062	\$	19,598
			20	017-19 Average	\$	175,169		_
Mar - Dec 2020 10- 2017-19 Mar - Dec	\$	19,598 175,169						
Estimated Pandemic-related Travel & Conf Savings								(155,571)
Consumer Advocate's Recommended Travel and Conference Expense Savings for Reg Asset								(155,571)