

Utility Customers get over \$69 M through OUR's Intervention and Compensation

(KINGSTON, Jamaica; 2023 July 31): The Office of Utilities Regulation (OUR) secured over \$69 million for utility consumers through its direct intervention and as a result of automatic compensation for Guaranteed Standards (GS) breaches.

The sum of \$1,127,822.29 was secured between 2022 October and 2023 March from the resolution of complaints and appeals the OUR's Consumer Affairs Unit received, whilst Jamaica Public Service Company Limited (JPS) and the National Water Commission (NWC) paid out \$66.48 million and \$1.67 million respectively for GS breaches.

Of the \$1,127,822.29 the OUR secured for customers, the NWC reversed charges totalling \$630,297.81 (56%), which related to some customers being billed for no service over an extended period. JPS accounted for \$492,426.92 (44%), which mainly represented refunds to several affected customers for sending consecutive estimated bills over an extended period. The subsequent actual meter readings indicated that there was an overestimation of consumption. FLOW accounted for less than 1% of the total amount.

The just-released OUR Quarterly Performance Report for the 2023 January – March period indicates that JPS's compliance report on its GS performance showed that 29,312 breaches were committed during the quarter. This represented an 18% increase when compared with the preceding period. The breaches attracted compensatory payments of approximately \$66.48 million, which were applied automatically to the affected customers' accounts. Like the previous period, Guaranteed Standards regarding Estimated Bills (which restricts JPS from sending more than two consecutive estimates without a penalty), Reconnection (which requires that JPS restores supply within 24 hours of payment of overdue amounts) and Connection to Supply (which prescribes the time within which JPS is to make a simple connection) accounted for 99% of GS breaches.

The NWC's Guaranteed Standards compliance report for the review period indicates that 2,013 breaches were committed, representing an 8% decrease. These breaches had a potential payout of approximately \$8.87 million while actual payments amounted to about \$1.67 million, or 19% of total potential payments, and were made by way of automatic credits to the affected accounts. The remaining 81% of potential payments not made represented those breaches for which the required claim forms were not submitted for validation.

The standards with the highest incidents of breaches for the NWC were: Complaint Investigations (which require that the NWC completes investigations and responds or provides an update within 30 working days of receipt of a complaint), Meter Repair/Replacement (which stipulates that defective meters are to be verified, repaired/replaced within 20 working days); and Access/New Service Connection (which requires NWC to connect a new supply within ten working days), accounted for 94% of total breaches.

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The OUR implemented Guaranteed Standards for JPS and NWC to hold them accountable for any breach of basic service standards to customers. Breaches attract a compensatory payment to affected customers, payable on customers' service accounts.

The 2023 January – March period also saw the OUR's Consumer Affairs Unit (CAU) receiving 677 contacts which represented a 24% decrease compared to the preceding period. The data shows that the most significant reductions were in the complaint categories of Disconnection (-44%), Interruption of Service (-35%), Guaranteed Standard (-17%), Billing Matters (-16%) and Poor Service Quality (8%).

The OUR's Quarterly Performance Report (2023 January – March) can be found on its website: www.our.org.jm.

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