

Media Release

Some Electricity Customers to receive a 40% Reprieve on Estimated Bills

(KINGSTON, Jamaica; 2024 July 30): Some electricity customers receiving estimated bills from the Jamaica Public Service Company Limited (JPS) will get a 40% reprieve after the Office of Utilities Regulation (OUR) approved a mechanism for calculating these bills following Hurricane Beryl.

The decision follows a 2024 July 22 meeting between the OUR and JPS after the latter notified the public about issuing estimated bills to some customers due to its inability to access meters in some areas, especially those badly damaged by Beryl.

JPS advised that for the billing cycle, which commenced on July 8 and as at July 22, four hundred and eighty-five thousand (485,000) bills were issued, of which One Hundred and Twenty-Two Thousand (122,000) customers were billed based on estimated consumption. A further two hundred and twenty-six thousand bills (226,000) were yet to be issued of which 56,000 were to be billed on estimated consumption.

“Even though JPS is authorised to issue estimated bills, it must be recognised that this arrangement was constructed for normal conditions. Under circumstances where many communities have had no power for the majority of the billing period and are already feeling the financial fallout with the restoration of their homes and livelihoods, it cannot be fair for them to be asked to pay for more than what they consume,” the Director-General of the OUR, Ansord Hewitt, pointed out.

Following inquiries with JPS about customer impact and available alternatives to soften the billing impact of consumers, the OUR agreed to a waiver of the mechanism for calculating estimated bills, specifically for customers impacted by extended outages. The objective is to lessen the impact on persons who could bear an increased financial burden if the prescribed regulatory methodology was used.

Approval of a 0.6 factor to the consumption estimate based on the last three actual readings to determine the net consumption, would mean a 40% reduction on the average for customers. These customers would be billed at 0.6 (60%) of what JPS estimated.

For customers with smart meters who were not already billed, the OUR also granted approval for JPS to use the last recorded reading. JPS is required to indicate to the OUR how it will deal with those customers who already received estimated bills in July as they should also benefit from similar treatment.

Turning to the other discretionary measures for customers the Director-General took note of and commended JPS’s announcement since engagement with the OUR of the following measures:

Relaxed Collections & Disconnection Processes

- i. JPS has relaxed its Collections and Disconnection processes. The Company has not disconnected customers for non-payment of bills since the passage of the hurricane.
- ii. JPS will also continue to facilitate flexible payment arrangements for customers who need extensions on their due dates. Requests are being dealt with on a case-by-case basis, so

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persons requiring extensions can make their request using the myJPS Mobile App or by contacting the JPS Customer Care Centre

He has also urged JPS to make further provision for customers who have not had electricity since 2024 July 3 and would not consequently benefit from the 20% discount.

Regarding the telecoms providers, as at 2024 July 29:

- Digicel has restored service to 96% of its Mobile customers and 98% of fixed services
- 92% of Mobile customers for FLOW has service, and 91% of Home

Additionally, for the telecoms providers, Flow has advised that it will go against the provisions of its Standard Terms and Conditions to offer, among other things:

- (a) a one-time rebate to customers' accounts whose Fixed services have been interrupted for more than 72 hours; and
- (b) an extra allowance of 5GB for one month to its Postpaid mobile customer. this will be rolled out in August.

Digicel has also advised us of the relief measures it has implemented for its customers, which include:

- (a) no payment for lost days of service for its prepaid and postpaid customers who were unable to connect to its network since Hurricane Beryl;
- (b) Prepaid customers being given a bundle consisting of 1 gigabyte of data and 30 local minutes, which will remain available throughout July. However, special accommodations are in place for customers in areas where service is not restored in July;
- (c) the suspension of late fees on bills due for payment on 2024 July 27 for its postpaid customers. this is in addition to the aforementioned rebate on lost days of service.

The OUR welcomes these moves and continues to exercise its regulatory functions to ensure that the utilities restore services within the timelines to which they committed.

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Contact: OUR's Public Affairs Unit – publicaffairs@our.org.jm or 876-968-6053

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