

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
UTILITIES COMMISSION
RALEIGH**

DOCKET NO. W-354, SUB 384

BEFORE THE NORTH CAROLINA UTILITIES COMMISSION

In the Matter of
Application by Carolina Water Service,)
Inc. of North Carolina for Authority to)
Adjust and Increase Rates and Charges)
for Water and Sewer Utility Service in)
All Service Areas in North Carolina)

DIRECT TESTIMONY
OF LAQUISHA M.
PARKS ON BEHALF
OF CAROLINA WATER
SERVICE, INC. OF
NORTH CAROLINA

July 2, 2021

1 **Q. PLEASE STATE YOUR NAME AND BUSINESS ADDRESS.**

2 A. My name is LaQuisha M. Parks and my business address is 4944 Parkway
3 Plaza Boulevard, Charlotte, North Carolina 28217.

4 **Q. WHERE ARE YOU EMPLOYED AND IN WHAT CAPACITY?**

5 A. I am Vice President of Customer Experience, US Operations for Corix
6 Group of Companies (“Corix”), a position I have held since June 30, 2021.
7 Prior to that, I held the position of Director of Customer Experience for Corix,
8 beginning when I joined Corix in September 2020.

9 **Q. WHAT IS YOUR EDUCATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL**
10 **BACKGROUND?**

11 A. I hold a Bachelor of Science degree in Engineering from North Carolina
12 Agricultural and Technical State University and a Master of Science in
13 Business from Pfeiffer University. I have over 18 years engineering,
14 customer service and executive management experience, most of which
15 was in the electric and gas industries, in various capacities. My positions
16 have included Director of Duke Energy Corporation’s Consumer Affairs
17 department, Regional General Manager of Duke Energy Corporation’s
18 Customer Care Operations department, and General Manager of the
19 Customer Operations department for Piedmont Natural Gas. I began my
20 career in 1995 as an engineer for the United States Department of Energy,
21 conducting energy audits for military facilities and naval ships.

1 **Q. WHAT ARE YOUR DUTIES AS VICE PRESIDENT OF CUSTOMER**
2 **EXPERIENCE OPERATIONS WITH CORIX?**

3 A. I have overall responsibility for implementing cultural processes aligned with
4 Corix’s “customer intimacy” strategy for regulated utility operations. I am
5 responsible for three contact centers in the states of North Carolina, Florida
6 and Illinois. I oversee all aspects of our Customer Experience Operations
7 Department, from policy formation and implementation, performance
8 standards, strategic objectives, to financial performance.

9 **Q. DO YOUR DUTIES AS VICE PRESIDENT OF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE**
10 **EXTEND TO THE CAROLINA WATER SERVICE OF NORTH CAROLINA**
11 **(“CWSNC”) UTILITY?**

12 A. Yes.

13 **Q. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF YOUR TESTIMONY IN THIS**
14 **PROCEEDING?**

15 A. The purpose of my testimony is to provide an overview of process and
16 organizational changes that recently have been implemented by Customer
17 Experience Operations in order to improve service to our customers. The
18 Customer Experience Operations Department was restructured in October
19 2020 in furtherance of Corix’s strategic vision. The goal of the Customer
20 Experience Operations Department is to enhance relationships with internal
21 and external customers while delivering on Corix’s overall strategy of
22 increased customer service through ongoing and continuous improvement

1 to customer care. The Customer Experience Operations team has worked
2 to achieve this goal by more clearly establishing the vision and mission of
3 how Corix delivers excellent customer service, and by aligning certain
4 internal operations of Corix to incentivize improved service to customers of
5 our utilities, such as CWSNC.

6 **Q. CAN YOU PLEASE SUMMARIZE THE VISION AND MISSION OF**
7 **CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE OPERATIONS?**

8 A. The vision of Customer Experience Operations is “CARE”: customer
9 focused and caring; agile and accountable; respectful and responsive; and
10 ease with which to do business. The Customer Experience Operation’s
11 mission is “EASE”: effective the first time; appreciate the customer each
12 time; safety all the time, and easy to do business with every time.

13 **Q. HOW HAVE YOU WORKED TO ADVANCE THE VISION AND MISSION**
14 **OF CORIX?**

15 A. First, the Customer Experience Operations Team worked with the Corix
16 corporate group to develop the vision and mission, and then announced it
17 to the internal workforce. The purpose of this was to make clear our
18 customer service expectations and align the organization and its customer
19 service operations to meet the vision and mission. Relatedly, we formally
20 rebranded the department as the Customer Experience Operations Team.
21 We also aligned the responsibility of division of labor within the group and
22 hired three new staff members in the Customer Experience Operations

1 Team. Corix also created a new pay structure to reward more experienced
2 employees. Culturally, we implemented an attendance merit program. This
3 is a new system of accountability for our department which rewards
4 employees for consistent attendance and great performance. The purpose
5 of this program is to drive positive behaviors, increase employee retention,
6 and help build excellence in performance.

7 **Q. WHAT OPERATIONAL CHANGES HAS THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE**
8 **OPERATIONS TEAM MADE TO BETTER SERVE CWSNC'S**
9 **CUSTOMERS?**

10 A. Operationally, we developed a regionalized support model to offer more
11 localized customer expertise and support. Prior to this change, if a CWSNC
12 customer called seeking support, it was possible that the customer would
13 be directed to a Corix customer support representative located in any given
14 Corix location. In contrast, now a CWSNC customer will be directed to a
15 local customer service representative. We believe this change is a better
16 model and provides improved customer service support for the current and
17 future needs of our customers. A closer connection to the communities we
18 serve will enable us to provide more informed and better care.

1 **Q. HOW DOES THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE OPERATION TEAM**
2 **ENSURE THE COMPANY’S STATED VISION AND MISSION ARE BEING**
3 **MET?**

4 A. Beginning in 2019, we implemented a process to obtain increased customer
5 feedback by means of a survey. Specifically, at the conclusion of every call
6 from a customer, the customer is prompted to complete a three-question
7 Customer Satisfaction Survey (“CSS”). The CSS questions solicit feedback
8 on the overall customer service provided to the customer, inquire as to
9 whether the issue was resolved, and ask whether the customer was
10 satisfied that the Company provided the effort and had the skills necessary
11 to resolve the issue. The customer’s responses to the CSS are used to
12 develop an overall score which is evaluated by the Customer Experience
13 Operations Team. These scores and customer feedback are then used in
14 coaching and training.

15 **Q. PLEASE EXPOUND ON THE COACHING AND TRAINING MODEL YOU**
16 **JUST MENTIONED.**

17 A. We keep and evaluate the CSS responses and the metrics that are
18 developed. Anything below a score of 90 triggers an evaluation of the call.
19 To that end, the Customer Experience Operations Team listens to the call,
20 then engages in training with the employee and their supervisor. The
21 purpose of this is to build and maintain high levels of service. We always
22 follow up with a customer if a complaint is lodged, or a score is less than

1 satisfactory, to seek a proactive resolution of the customer's issue. In
2 addition, we implemented a new coaching model in December 2020 to
3 ensure our Customer Experience Specialists ("CES") receive timely
4 feedback on call quality and customer interactions that are not related to the
5 survey. The model is a platform of a two-way communication, where the
6 Supervisor and the Customer Experience Specialists listen to 2-3
7 calls/month and discuss opportunities for improvement and successes
8 during the call. The calls are graded based on how well the CES handled
9 the call. A score of 90 or above is the target. The coaching model ensures
10 that each CES is knowledgeable about what they are trained to do and able
11 to demonstrate that aptitude. The model is used to work on personal
12 improvement on a one-on-one basis. We recently hired a full-time trainer
13 to develop, plan, schedule, facilitate, and lead internal "on-going" training
14 programs across Customer Experience to develop our employees, ensure
15 consistency, retain organizational knowledge, and develop soft skills.
16 Through the establishment of a training program, by fostering an
17 environment that values continuous education and providing employees
18 with the training resources needed for success, the Training Coordinator
19 will reinforce our overall customer service strategy.

1 **Q. HAS CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IMPROVED AS A RESULT OF**
2 **THESE INITIATIVES?**

3 A. Yes, and the data reflects that the Company's customer service efforts
4 continue to be successful. The Company maintains overall metrics on the
5 results of the CSS. As I mentioned, the target score on each question is
6 90, and as of mid-June 2021, the Company's overall score on each question
7 met or surpassed the target number of 90. Additionally, each question of
8 the CSS has either improved or maintained its score over the course of
9 2021. I would add that the percentage of calls answered within sixty
10 seconds has increased over the course of 2021, and the abandonment rate
11 of calls has decreased. All of these data points reflect positive customer
12 service efforts by the Company.

13 **Q. WHAT CUSTOMER EDUCATION AND OUTREACH EFFORTS HAS THE**
14 **COMPANY MADE WITH ITS STAKEHOLDERS AND CUSTOMERS**
15 **WITH REGARD TO THE COVID-19 EMERGENCY?**

16 A. The Company took numerous actions to address the Covid-19 pandemic.
17 Beginning in the spring of 2020, the Company sent weekly updates to our
18 stakeholders. The Company complied with all orders from the Commission
19 regarding COVID, including those related to suspension of disconnections,
20 prohibition on utility shut-offs, late fees, reconnection fees, the stay-at-home
21 order, assisting North Carolinians at risk of eviction, and related Executive
22 Orders. We placed all of these orders on the CWSNC website, providing

1 information to the benefit of our customers. Similarly, the Company issued
2 numerous press releases, social media posts, website posts and notices
3 related to these same topics.

4 **Q. DID THE COMPANY PARTICIPATE IN THE NORTH CAROLINA HOPE**
5 **PROGRAM?**

6 A. Yes. The HOPE Program is a North Carolina program that provides rent
7 and utility bill assistance to help prevent evictions and utility disconnections.
8 After learning that funds were available in the state of North Carolina,
9 CWSNC placed announcements on its social media and website to
10 generate customer interest. The Customer Experience Operations team
11 prepared for and addressed customer inquiries, and CWSNC staff met with
12 state staff to coordinate data collection and sharing processes to facilitate
13 funds being applied to eligible customers' accounts. CWSNC's participation
14 in the program advantaged more than 15,000 customers.

15 **Q. DOES THE COMPANY PLAN TO MAKE ANY OUTREACH WITH**
16 **RESPECT TO THE LOW INCOME HOUSEHOLD WATER ASSISTANCE**
17 **PROGRAM ("LIHWAP")?**

18 A. Yes. It is my understanding that funds have been allocated to the state of
19 North Carolina based on recent federal legislative action. At this point, it
20 remains unclear as to how the LIHWAP program will work and how these
21 state funds will be allocated, specifically. As such, we plan to contact the
22 North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of

1 Social Services, Economic & Family Services to ensure our customers have
2 the best possible access to these funds.

3 **Q. IS THIS TESTIMONY TRUE AND ACCURATE TO THE BEST OF YOUR**
4 **KNOWLEDGE, INFORMATION, AND BELIEF?**

5 A. Yes.

6 **Q. DOES THIS CONCLUDE YOUR PRE-FILED DIRECT TESTIMONY?**

7 A. Yes, it does. However, I reserve the right to update or amend this testimony
8 upon receipt of additional relevant data or other information that may
9 become available.