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CUB ANALYSIS: 'MUNICIPAL AGGREGATION' OFFERS CANNOT GUARANTEE SAVINGS

More than 9 out of 10 community-negotiated power offers in Ameren Illinois territory are currently money-losers, while most of the offers in Commonwealth Edison territory are either about the same as or better than the utility supply price, according to a CUB review in August of data from the **state of Illinois' electric choice website.**

CUB's analysis on municipal aggregation follows **an earlier CUB review of state data** that estimated Illinois consumers with alternative suppliers–including those on aggregation offers–have lost about $2.3 billion since 2015.

"CUB's main message is buyer beware–don't assume any offer with an alternative supplier will save you money," CUB Executive Director Sarah Moskowitz said Thursday. "Municipal aggregation can be a decent choice for households in certain communities, but it's not the only choice. Energy policy in Illinois has created a whole menu of strong options that can save you money and also support cleaner energy–starting with energy efficiency programs. We encourage people to explore those opportunities."

Illinois law allows municipalities and counties to enter into electric supply agreements on behalf of residential and small-business utility customers living within their borders. This is called "municipal aggregation." Typically, if electricity customers do not proactively switch, their electricity will by default be supplied by the utility — ComEd or Ameren. However, local governments in communities that have passed a referendum in favor of aggregation can negotiate the price of power from a different supplier, and switch residents automatically. (Residents can opt-out of these offers.)

For customers who are part of a municipal aggregation offer, ComEd or Ameren would still be responsible for delivering that electricity to homes and billing those customers for it. In theory, municipal aggregation allows communities to use the collective bargaining power of their residents to negotiate for lower power prices from suppliers. But CUB's analysis showed savings are far from guaranteed.

[To see if you are saving or losing with an alternative supplier look for the "price to compare" on your electric bill. This is the price per kilowatt-hour (kWh) you would be paying if Ameren or ComEd were your supplier. Compare that price with the "supply price" charged by an alternative supplier on your bill.]

In August, CUB reviewed community power deals listed on **PlugIn.Illinois.gov**, a website managed by the Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) that keeps a running list of municipal aggregation offers. It showed that Illinois communities have run 752 aggregation programs historically across both territories (392 Ameren, 360 ComEd) since the state authorized aggregation in 2009. Of those, 434 had an active, currently-priced offer in place: 259 in Ameren territory, 175 in ComEd territory.

CUB's review compared active municipal aggregation offers against the utilities' "price to compare," which is currently 10.399 cents per kWh for ComEd and 11.326 cents per kWh for Ameren. These rates are called the "price to compare" because they allow electricity customers to make an easy, apples-to-apples comparison to alternative supplier offers. Below are the results of CUB's research, most of which was done on Aug. 11.

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- In Ameren territory, the overwhelming majority of municipal aggregation offers — 245, or 94.6 percent — were more expensive than the utility's supply price — by about 0.7 cents per kWh on average, and up to about 2.2 cents per kWh in the worst cases, according to CUB's review. **Important:** Ameren's supply rate is seasonal and is expected to go down on Oct. 1, making municipal aggregation offers that are currently losing money even worse deals. Homefield Energy held 187 of Ameren's 259 active deals (72 percent). Most of those had prices that were higher than the utility–its contracts averaged about 0.6 cents per kWh higher than Ameren's supply price, CUB found.

- In ComEd territory, half of the active offers (89, or 50.9 percent) were charging less than the utility's supply price, and another 70, or 40 percent, were contractually indexed to match ComEd's price exactly, meaning those communities can't end up worse off than the utility default rate, even as prices move. Additionally, about 6 percent of plans (10) were extremely close to ComEd's price–just a fraction of a penny higher or lower. MC Squared Energy Services held 135 of the 175 active deals (77 percent). Most of the MC Squared plans had prices that were lower than ComEd's price, close to it, or indexed to the utility supply price.

CUB offered tips:

- Check your bill's supply line to see what your current supplier is and what rate you're paying.
- If you're in Ameren territory, there's a good chance your community's aggregation rate is currently more expensive than the utility's supply price. If you're in ComEd territory, you're more likely to be at or below ComEd's supply price.
- If your aggregation rate is currently more expensive than the utility's supply price, you can opt out and return to your default utility service without paying an exit fee. To do so, just call the supplier listed on your bill. Reasonably priced municipal aggregation green plans can be a legitimate option for interested consumers. Below, CUB lists other choices that can help you be green and cut your utility bills at the same time.
- If you are looking for ways to potentially cut your electric bill, Illinois has multiple options:
    - **Energy efficiency programs** offered by ComEd and Ameren.
    - **ComEd Peak Time Savings** or **Ameren Peak Time Rewards.** These programs give you a bill credit if you're able to reduce your energy usage for a limited number of hours on certain days (typically hot summer afternoons) when electricity demand is highest.
    - **ComEd's Hourly Pricing** and **Ameren's Power Smart Pricing** programs, which charge a market rate that can change hourly.
    - **Community Solar**, which offers the benefits of solar power (lower bills) without having to install panels on your property.

Read more about this analysis **at CUB's website.**

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For more than 40 years the Citizens Utility Board (CUB) has been Illinois' leading nonprofit utility watchdog group. Created by the Illinois Legislature, CUB opened its doors in 1984 to represent the interests of residential and small-business utility customers. Since then, CUB has saved consumers more than $20 billion by helping to block rate hikes and secure refunds. For more information, call CUB's Consumer Hotline at 1-800-669-5556 or visit CUB's website, ***www.CitizensUtilityBoard.org.***