FILED
January 20, 2023
INDIANA UTILITY
REGULATORY COMMISSION

STATE OF INDIANA INDIANA UTILITY REGULATORY COMMISSION

PETITION OF NORTHERN INDIANA PUBLIC SERVICE) COMPANY LLC PURSUANT TO IND. CODE §§ 8-1-2-42.7, 8-1-2-61, AND, 8-1-2.5-6 FOR (1) AUTHORITY TO MODIFY ITS RETAIL RATES AND CHARGES FOR ELECTRIC UTILITY SERVICE THROUGH A PHASE IN OF RATES; (2) APPROVAL OF NEW SCHEDULES OF RATES AND CHARGES, GENERAL RULES AND REGULATIONS, AND RIDERS (BOTH EXISTING AND NEW); (3) APPROVAL OF A NEW RIDER FOR VARIABLE NONLABOR O&M ASSOCIATED WITH **EXPENSES** COALFIRED GENERATION: (4) MODIFICATION OF THE FUEL COST ADJUSTMENT TO PASS BACK 100% OF OFF-SYSTEM SALES REVENUES NET OF EXPENSES; (5) APPROVAL OF REVISED **COMMON** AND **ELECTRIC** DEPRECIATION RATES **APPLICABLE** TO ITS ELECTRIC PLANT IN SERVICE; (6) APPROVAL OF **NECESSARY** AND APPROPRIATE ACCOUNTING RELIEF. INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO APPROVAL OF (A) CERTAIN DEFERRAL MECHANISMS FOR PENSION AND OTHER POSTRETIREMENT **BENEFITS EXPENSES**: **(B) APPROVAL** REGULATORY ACCOUNTING FOR ACTUAL COSTS OF REMOVAL ASSOCIATED WITH COAL **UNITS** FOLLOWING THE RETIREMENT OF MICHIGAN CITY UNIT 12, AND (C) A MODIFICATION OF JOINT VENTURE ACCOUNTING AUTHORITY TO COMBINE RESERVE ACCOUNTS FOR PURPOSES OF PASSING BACK JOINT VENTURE CASH, (7) APPROVAL OF ALTERNATIVE REGULATORY PLANS FOR THE (A) MODIFICATION OF ITS INDUSTRIAL **SERVICE** STRUCTURE, AND (B) IMPLEMENTATION OF A LOW **INCOME** PROGRAM; AND (8) REVIEW **AND** DETERMINATION OF NIPSCO'S EARNINGS BANK FOR PURPOSES OF IND. CODE § 8-1-2-42.3.

CAUSE NO. 45772

INDIANA OFFICE OF UTILITY CONSUMER COUNSELOR

PUBLIC'S EXHIBIT NO. 3

TESTIMONY OF OUCC WITNESS WES R. BLAKLEY

JANUARY 20, 2023

Respectfully submitted,

Kelly Earls, Attorney No. 29653-49

Deputy Consumer Counselor

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TESTIMONY OF OUCC WITNESS WES R. BLAKLEY CAUSE NO. 45772 NORTHERN INDIANA PUBLIC SERVICE COMPANY LLC.

I. <u>INTRODUCTION</u>

1	Q:	Please state your name and business address.					
2	A:	My name is Wes R. Blakley and my business address is 115 W. Washington St.,					
3		Suite 1500 South, Indianapolis, Indiana 46204.					
4	Q:	By whom are you employed and in what capacity?					
5	A:	I am a Senior Utility Analyst in the Electric Division for the Office of Utility					
6		Consumer Counselor ("OUCC"). My educational background is described in					
7		Appendix A to my testimony.					
8	Q:	What is the purpose of your testimony?					
9	A:	The purpose of my testimony is to provide an analysis and make					
10		recommendations on proposals Northern Indiana Public Service Company LLC.					
11		("NIPSCO") made in its case-in-chief, including the following:					
12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22		(1) The ratemaking treatment for the increase in Amortization Expense for the Forward Test Year for recovery of NIPSCO's COVID-19 expense relating to the Commission's June 29, 2020 Order in Cause No. 45380, which authorized the use of regulatory accounting of waived convenience fees, waived late fees, and incremental bad debt expense. The Bad Debt Expense related to the pandemic moratorium includes both the forecasted estimate and the incremental expense over the embedded expense incurred during the moratorium. NIPSCO has deferred costs beyond the date of the Commission's moratorium established in its August 12, 2020 Second Interim Emergency Order in Cause No. 45380.					
23 24 25 26		(2) NIPSCO's request for recovery of coal combustion residual ("CCR") removal costs for its Michigan City Generating Station in Cause No. 45700 and its R.M. Schahfer Generating Station ("Schahfer") in Cause No. 45797. In both cases, NIPSCO is					

1 requesting relief under the Federal Mandate Statute (Ind. Code ch. 2 8-1-8.4) and seeking recovery using its Federally Mandated Cost 3 Adjustment Rider ("FMCA"). I discuss how these requests could affect rates in this Cause. 4 5 To the extent you do not address a specific item or adjustment, should that Q: be construed to mean you agree with NIPSCO's proposal? 6 7 A: No. Excluding any specific adjustments or amounts proposed by NIPSCO from 8 my testimony does not indicate my approval of those adjustments or amounts, but 9 rather that the scope of my testimony is limited to the specific items addressed 10 herein. II. REVIEW AND ANALYSIS 11 Q: Please describe the review and analysis you conducted in order to prepare 12 vour testimony. 13 A: I read NIPSCO's prefiled testimony and reviewed its exhibits, schedules, 14 workpapers and responses to certain data requests. III. COVID-19 EXPENSES 15 Q: What is NIPSCO's request in relation to recovery of COVID-19 expenses? 16 A: NIPSCO has requested recovery of costs authorized by the Commission's June 17 29, 2020, Order in Cause No. 45380 that permitted the use of regulatory 18 accounting for O&M, convenience fees, late fees and incremental bad debt 19 expense relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. NIPSCO's adjustment defers 20 \$3,755,703 of COVID-19 costs and amortizes it over two years for an increase in 21 amortization expense of \$1,877,852, which is shown on NIPSCO Workpaper 22 AMTZ 8 as Adjustment AMTZ 8-23R. The total of NIPSCO's deferred COVID-23 19 costs were calculated from March of 2020 through December 2020, shown on

1		Petitioner's Confidential Exhibit No. 22-S2 (Redacted) page 647 of 764,						
2		Workpaper AMTZ 8 Page [.2] line 49.						
3	Q:	Do you agree with the NIPSCO's calculation of deferred COVID-19 costs?						
4	A:	No. The Commission's June 29, 2020, Phase I and Interim Emergency Order						
5		provided Indiana jurisdictional utilities with the following authority:						
6 7 8 9 10 11 12		All jurisdictional Indiana utilities are authorized to use regulatory accounting for COVID-19 related impacts directly associated with any prohibition on utility disconnections, collection of certain utility fees (i.e., late fees, convenience fees, deposits, and reconnection fees) and the use of expanded payment arrangement, as well as COVID-19 related uncollectable and incremental bad debt expense. ¹						
13		The utility disconnection moratorium, which was not renewed by the						
14		Commission's August 12, 2020, Second Interim Emergency Order, lapsed on						
15		August 14, 2020. The Commission's August 12, 2020, Order extended the waiver						
16		of certain utility fees and charges for another 60 days while also permitting						
17		continued regulatory accounting treatment of these deferred costs "consistent with						
18		our findings in the Emergency Order."						
19		Based on a 60-day extension from the date of the Commission's Second						
20		Interim Emergency Order on August 12, 2020, Indiana's jurisdictional utilities						
21		were granted regulatory accounting treatment for eligible COVID-19 related costs						
22		until October 12, 2020.						
23 24	Q:	Did NIPSCO cease deferring incremental bad debt expense on October 12, 2020?						
25	A:	No. The regulatory accounting authority the Commission provided expired on						

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¹ Cause No. 45380 First Order, pp 9-10.

1 October 12, 2020, and NIPSCO continued deferring COVID-19 expenses through 2 December 31, 2020. 3 Q: How should NIPSCO's incremental COVID-19 expenses be calculated for 4 purposes of recovery in rates? 5 NIPSCO's deferred incremental COVID-19 expense calculation should conform A: 6 with the precise period of the Commission's accounting authority from Cause No. 7 45380. This period began on March 19, 2020, when Governor Holcomb issued 8 Executive Order 20-05 declaring utility service an essential service that cannot be 9 disconnected during the COVID-19 public health emergency, until 60 days from 10 the date of the Commission's August 12, 2020 Second Interim Emergency Order, 11 which is October 12, 2020. I calculated COVID-19 expenses for the months of 12 March and October on a pro rata basis. My calculation results in \$1,576,247² 13 incremental COVID-19 expenses for the moratorium period. Amortizing this 14 amount over two years will result in \$788,124 in annual recovery of COVID-19 15 expense versus the \$1,877,852, annual amortization expense NIPSCO calculated. 16 This results in a \$1,089,728 decrease in the annual amortization of COVID-19 17 expense in this Cause.

IV. COAL COMBUSTION RESIDENTIAL ACCOUNTING ("CCR")

- 18 Q: Please comment on NIPSCO's calculations regarding costs associated with the Michigan City and Schahfer CCR ash ponds.
- 20 A: In Cause No. 45700, NIPSCO has requested approval of its costs for closure of Michigan City's CCR ash ponds ("Ash Pond Compliance Project"). An order and

² Attachment WRB-1.

tracker filing are likely to occur in the first quarter of 2023. In the current rate case, NIPSCO is forecasting to defer, as a regulatory asset, 20 percent of Michigan City's CCR cost and is proposing to amortize that amount through December 31, 2032. This is shown on NIPSCO's adjustment AMTZ 6 -23R, which increases amortization expense in the forecasted test year to recover the 20 percent of the deferred FMCA CCR regulatory asset.

In Cause No. 45797, NIPSCO is seeking recovery of and return on investment for the closure costs of its Schahfer CCR ash ponds through its FMCA tracker. NIPSCO did not make any adjustment in its current rate case involving the Schahfer CCR ash pond project. Depending on when the order for that case is issued and when actual costs for the project start to be incurred, accounts could be booked that could affect the current base rate case, which has a test year ending December 31, 2023.

14 Q: Please explain how the two CCR cases could affect this rate case.

A:

The costs for Michigan City and Schahfer CCR projects are treated as removal costs and are recorded by NIPSCO as a retirement work order, which increases rate base by reducing Accumulated Depreciation (Account 108). Stated another way, net original cost rate base is equal to Utility Plant in Service minus Accumulated Depreciation. NIPSCO explains correctly in both Cause Nos. 45700 and 45797 that reducing Accumulated Depreciation (through a debit journal entry) increases net original cost rate base just as much as if NIPSCO had made the same investment in Utility Plant in Service.

Q: Did NIPSCO address the effect the ash pond removal costs have on depreciation rates in the rate case?

1 A: Yes. NIPSCO witness Kevin Blissmer addresses how the removal costs will be 2 treated in the rate case if NIPSCO's costs in Cause No. 45700 are approved as 3 federally mandated per Ind. Code ch 8-1-8.4. He states: 4 As discussed in NIPSCO's case-in-chief filed in Cause No. 45700,

which relates directly to CCR pond closure costs for Michigan City Generating Station ("Michigan City"), recovery of the costs for Michigan City, R.M. Schahfer Generating Station ("Schahfer"), and Bailly Generating Station will be addressed under Ind. Code ch. 8-1-8.4, which is a statute that allows for recovery of federally mandated costs. NIPSCO did this so that these estimated costs can be reviewed in the context of the specific review of NIPSCO's plans for compliance. For this reason, NIPSCO excluded these costs from the Decommissioning Cost Study prepared by NIPSCO Witness Kopp (Attachment 14-B) and is not proposing to recover these compliance costs through base rates in this proceeding. However, if for any reason, those costs are not deemed recoverable in a federal mandate case, then these costs would properly be considered costs of removal and should be included in calculating depreciation accrual rates in a future base rate case. In that event, NIPSCO would continue to charge FERC Account 108 for any costs incurred.³

Thus, NIPSCO removes the effect of the CCR costs from depreciation rates

23 because those costs will be recovered in the FMCA tracker through amortization.

24 Q: Did NIPSCO explain how it would account for ash pond removal cost 25 relating to Michigan City and Schahfer Generating Stations?

Yes. In OUCC Data Request 17-014⁴, NIPSCO was asked if it had forecasted a A: 27 debit in the test year to the accumulated depreciation account (Account 108) for CCR removal costs of both the Michigan City and Schahfer Generating Stations. 28 NIPSCO responded, "To the extent either project is completed by December 31,

30 2023, there would be a debit to Account 108 for the actual costs incurred."

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³ NIPSCO Cause No. 45722 Testimony of Kevin J. Blissmer, page 10, line1through 9.

⁴ Attachment WRB-2.

2		Michigan City and Schahfer Generating Station Ash Pond Compliance Projects					
3		were not included in the forecasted test year for recovery in Cause No. 45772 and					
4		if relief requested in NIPSCO's Cause No. 45700 and 45797 that permits the Ash					
5		Pond Compliance Projects costs of Michigan City and Shaffer to be recovered in					
6		the FMCA is granted, NIPSCO would exclude any related amount debited to					
7		Account 108 from the calculation of revenue requirement in Cause No. 45772.					
8	Q:	Did NIPSCO also explain how ash pond removal costs effect rate base?					
9	A:	Not in this rate case, but as stated earlier in my testimony NIPSCO states					
10		correctly in its FMCA filings in Cause No. 45700 and Cause No. 45797 that the					
11		debit to Accumulated Depreciation (Account 108) for removal costs reduces the					
12		balance of Accumulated Depreciation costs and increases net original costs rate					
13		base just as if NIPSCO has made the same investment in Utility Plant in Service.					
14 15 16 17	Q:	Is the OUCC satisfied in this Cause with NIPSCO's responses to OUCC data requests concerning the accounting treatment for CCR removal costs and its effect on rate base if Cause Nos. 45700 and 45797 are approved by the Commission?					
18	A:	No. In response to OUCC Data Request 32-001 and 32-0025 relating to					
19		Michigan City and Schahfer CCR removal costs, NIPSCO states that the cost					
20		incurred on Michigan City CCR removal project through November 2022 is					
21		\$25,468,752 and cost incurred on the Schahfer CCR removal project through					
22		November 2022 is \$3,781,072. NIPSCO states that there would be a debit to					
23		Account 108, accumulated depreciation, and a credit to accounts payable or cash					

NIPSCO also states that debits to accumulated depreciation for removal costs for

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⁵ Attachment WRB-3.

for the costs incurred. NIPSCO has debited Account 108 with incurred CCR removal costs of \$29,249,824 for Michigan City and Schahfer as of November 2022. They will continue to incur costs for these projects through the end of the future test year in this Cause of December 31, 2023, debiting these costs to Account 108. As NIPSCO has testified in its FMCA filings in Cause Nos. 45700 and 45797, that debits to Accumulated Depreciation (Account 108) for removal costs reduces the balance of Accumulated Depreciation costs and increases net original costs rate base just as if NIPSCO has made the same investment in Utility Plant in Service.

Could NIPSCO's proposed accounting treatment in the FMCA's and this Cause result in over recovery of costs?

Yes. NIPSCO has stated in response to OUCC Data Request 32-001 and 32-002

Q:

A:

Yes. NIPSCO has stated in response to OUCC Data Request 32-001 and 32-002 that the closure and removal costs of Michigan City and Schahfer projects were not included in the forecasted test year for recovery in this case. NIPSCO's denial of including removal costs in the forecast is not supported by adjustment or discussed in testimony and NIPSCO admits the removal costs exist and are recorded as debits to Account 108. The costs incurred for the CCR removal costs will continue to be incurred right up to the end of the test year, December 31, 2023. The fact that the removal costs for the Michigan City and Schahfer projects are purported not to be in the forecasted rate base does not provide assurance that it might be included in rate base at the end of the compliance filing process.

Q: What happens in the compliance filing process?

23 A: Utilities that file a rate case using a future test year usually request a two-step rate 24 increase as NIPSCO has in this Cause. At the second and final rate increase, there

is a compliance filing that demonstrates the utility property placed in rate base must actually be used and useful. The Commission in its Prehearing Conference Order in Indiana-American Cause No. 44450 discusses the treatment of the phasein of rate base issue for a future test year. The Commission states in that order "rates will be based on a projected rate base that is not in service, there must be a mechanism to phase in rates at one or more intervals during the test period to account for completed projects up to that interval." The Step 2 proceeding thus must take projected data and adjust it to actual used and useful utility plant in service. This actual plant in service is almost always different than the forecast. What should NIPSCO's Step 2 compliance filing include in relation to the actual incurred CCR removal costs for Michigan City and Schahfer projects? In Cause Nos. 45700 and 45797, NIPSCO requests CCR removal cost for Michigan City and Schahfer projects to be included for recovery in its FMCA tracker be approved. NIPSCO should also include the entries that demonstrate it removed all actual incurred CCR removal costs booked to accumulated

V. <u>RECOMMENDATIONS</u>

depreciation (Account No 108) for the Michigan City and Schahfer projects. This

will assure that NIPSCO would not be recovering a return "on" its CCR removal

20 Q: What do you recommend in this proceeding?

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Q:

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21 A: Based on the analysis described above, I recommend:

costs in both the FMCA tracker and also in base rates.

NIPSCO's calculation of forecasted COVID-19 expense be based on the regulatory accounting authority provided by the Commission in Cause No.

9	A:	Yes.	
8	Q:	Does	this conclude your testimony?
7			year for both Michigan City and Schahfer CCR projects.
6			to its accumulated depreciation account through December 31, 2023 test
5			NIPSCO remove any CCR removal costs incurred through an adjustment
4			No. 45797 to include CCR removal costs in NIPSCO's FMCA, that
3		2)	If the IURC approves NIPSCO's requests in Cause No. 45700 and Cause
2			oppose NIPSCO's proposed two-year amortization period.
1			45380, calculated from March 6, 2020 to October 12, 2020. I do not

APPENDIX A

1	Q:	Please describe your educational background and experience.			
2	A:	I received a Bachelor of Science Degree in Business with a major in Accounting			
3		from Eastern Illinois University in 1987 and worked for Illinois Consolidate			
4		Telephone Company until joining the OUCC in April 1991 as a staff accounta			
5		Since that time, I have reviewed and testified in hundreds of trackers, rate ca			
6		and other proceedings before the Commission. I have attended the Annual			
7		Regulatory Studies Program sponsored by NARUC at Michigan State University			
8		in East Lansing, Michigan as well as the Wisconsin Public Utility Institute at the			
9		University of Wisconsin-Madison Energy Basics Program.			

NIPSCO
Deferred Covide-19 Regulatory Asset 2020

	Moratorium Period	О&М	Late Fees	Bad Debt	NIPSCO Total Reg. Asset	OUCC Total Reg Asset
Mar-20	6-Mar	0	0	0	0	\$0
Apr-20		0	0	0	0	0
May-20		0	0	0	0	0
Jun-20		0	0	769,345	769,345	769,345
Jul-20		0	0	768,538	768,538	768,538
Aug-20		92,055	1,172,421	638,291	1,902,767	1,902,767
Sep-20		53,544	956,306	708,442	1,718,292	1,718,292
Oct-20	12-Oct	0	249,502	621,040	870,542	336,984
Nov-20		0	0	703,368	703,368	0
Dec-20		0	0	942,530	942,530	0
COVID-19 Reg. Asset		145,599	2,378,229	5,151,554	7,675,382	5,495,926
Less 2021 Expense					3,919,679	3,919,679
Difference					3,755,703	1,576,247
Divide by 2 years					2	2
Annual A	mortization				\$1,877,852	\$788,124
Adjustme	ent decrease					(\$1,089,728)

Cause No. 45772 OUCC Attachment WRB-2 Page 1 of 1

Cause No. 45772

Northern Indiana Public Service Company LLC's Objections and Responses to

Indiana Office of Utility Consumer Counselor's Seventeenth Set of Data Requests

OUCC Request 17-014:

Please provide the amount NIPSCO has forecasted to debit in the test year to the accumulated depreciation account for closure and removal costs of the Michigan City Generating Station Ash Pond Compliance Project. Please provide the amount NIPSCO has forecasted to debit in the test year to the accumulated depreciation account for the closure and removal of the Schahfer Generating Station Ash Pond Compliance Project.

Objections:

Response:

To the extent either project is completed by December 31, 2023, there would be a debit to Account 108 for the actual costs incurred. Forecasted debits for the closure and removal costs of the Michigan City and Schahfer Generating Station Ash Pond Compliance Projects were not included in the forecasted test year for recovery in this case. Consistent with NIPSCO's filings in Cause Nos. 45700 and 45797, costs associated with these projects are not forecasted to be included in this base rate proceeding. If the relief requested is granted in Cause Nos. 45700 and 45797, NIPSCO would exclude any related amount debited to Account 108 from the calculation of the revenue requirement in this case. To the extent the relief requested in Cause Nos. 45700 and 45797 is denied, then any amounts debited to Account 108 before December 31, 2023 would be included in the calculation of the revenue requirement in this Cause. For purposes of the estimated costs, see NIPSCO's case-in-chief in Cause Nos. 45700 and 45797.

Cause No. 45772 OUCC Attachment WRB-3 Page 1 of 2

Cause No. 45772

Northern Indiana Public Service Company LLC's Objections and Responses to

Indiana Office of Utility Consumer Counselor's Thirty-Second Set of Data Requests

OUCC Request 32-001:

Follow up to Data Request 17-14: Have any costs been incurred on the Michigan City Ash Pod Compliance Project? If yes, how much were the costs, when were they incurred, and what were the accounting entries made to account for these costs?

Objections:

Response:

NIPSCO has incurred costs of \$25,468,752 on the Michigan City Ash Pond Compliance Project through November 2022. There would be a debit to Account 108 and a credit to accounts payable or cash for the actual costs incurred. Note the closure and removal costs of the Michigan City were not included in the forecasted test year for recovery in this case. Consistent with NIPSCO's filings in Cause Nos. 45700, costs associated with these projects are not forecasted to be included in this base rate proceeding. If the relief requested is granted in Cause Nos. 45700, NIPSCO would exclude any related amount debited to Account 108 from the calculation of the revenue requirement in this case. Once the project is completed and to the extent the relief requested in Cause No. 45700 is denied, then any amounts debited to Account 108 before December 31, 2023 would be included in the calculation of the revenue requirement in this Cause. See OUCC Request 32-001 Attachment A for the costs incurred.

Cause No. 45772

Northern Indiana Public Service Company LLC's Objections and Responses to

Indiana Office of Utility Consumer Counselor's Thirty-Second Set of Data Requests

OUCC Request 32-002:

Follow up to Data Request 17-14: Have any costs been incurred on the Schahfer Generating Station Ash Pod Compliance Project? If yes, how much were the costs, when were they incurred, and what were the accounting entries made to account for these costs?

Objections:

Response:

NIPSCO has incurred costs of \$3,781,072 on the Schahfer Ash Pod Compliance Project (the Multi Cell Unit) through November 2022. Incurred costs are recorded as a debit to Account 108 and a credit to accounts payable or cash. Note the closure and removal costs of the Schahfer Generating Station Ash Pond Multi Unit Cell Project were not included in the forecasted test year for recovery in this case. Consistent with NIPSCO's filings in Cause No. 45797, costs associated with the projects are not forecasted to be included in this base rate proceeding. If the relief requested is granted in Cause No. 45797, NIPSCO would exclude any related amount debited to Account 108 from the calculation of the revenue requirement in this case. Once the project is completed and to the extent the relief requested in Cause No. 45797 is denied, then any amounts debited to Account 108 before December 31, 2023 would be included in the calculation of the revenue requirement in this Cause. See OUCC Request 32-002 Attachment A for the costs incurred.

AFFIRMATION

I affirm, under the penalties for perjury, that the foregoing representations are true.

Wes R. Blakley

Senior Utility Analyst

Indiana Office of Utility Consumer Counselor

Cause No. 45572

NIPSCO

Date: 1/20/2023

Certificate of Service

This is to certify that a copy of the Indiana Office of Utility Consumer Counselor's Testimony Filing has been served upon the following parties of record in the captioned proceeding by electronic service on January 20, 2023.

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