

(i) May conduct the public hearing without complying with formal rules of evidence; and

(ii) Shall allow any interested party to introduce evidence that relates to the proposed change, including testimony by witnesses.

(c) (1) The Commission may permit a facility to change any rate or charge temporarily, if the Commission considers it to be in the public interest.

(2) An approved temporary change becomes effective immediately on filing.

(3) Under the review procedures of this section, the Commission promptly shall consider the reasonableness of the temporary change.

(d) If the Commission modifies a proposed change or approves only part of a proposed change, a facility, without losing its right to appeal the part of the Commission order that denies full approval of the proposed change, may:

(1) Charge its patients according to the decision of the Commission; and

(2) Accept any benefits under that decision.

(e) If a change in any rate or charge increase becomes effective because a final determination is delayed because of an appeal or otherwise, the Commission may order the facility:

(1) To keep a detailed and accurate account of:

(i) Funds received because of the change; and

(ii) The persons from whom these funds were collected; and

(2) As to any funds received because of a change that later is held excessive or unreasonable:

(i) To refund the funds with interest; or

(ii) If a refund of the funds is impracticable, to charge over and amortize the funds through a temporary decrease in charges or rates.

(f) A decision by the Commission on any contested change under this section shall comply with the Administrative Procedure Act and shall be only prospective in effect.

(g) (1) The State Health Services Cost Review Commission shall provide incentives for merger, consolidation, and conversion and for the implementation of the institution-specific plan developed [by the Health Resources Planning Commission] IN ACCORDANCE WITH § 19-122 OF THIS TITLE.

(2) Notwithstanding any of the provisions in this section, on notification of a merger or consolidation by 2 or more hospitals, the Commission shall review the rates of those hospitals that are directly involved in the merger or consolidation in