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November 20, 2019

Rosemary Chiavetta, Esq., Secretary Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission Commonwealth Keystone Building 400 North Street, 2nd Floor Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17120

Final Policy Statement and Order Re: 2019 Amendments to Policy Statement on Re: Customer Assistance Program, 52 Pa. Code §§ 69.261 – 69.267, Docket No. M-2019-3012599

Dear Secretary Chiavetta:

Enclosed for filing please find the Petition of the Energy Association of Pennsylvania for Stay of Ordering Paragraphs Six, Seven, and Eight of Final Policy Statement Order at the abovereferenced docket.

Copies have been served per the attached Certificate of Service.

Sincerely,

Donna M.J. Clark

Vice President & General Counsel

iman M. J. Clark

Joseph Magee, Bureau of Consumer Services (via email) cc:

Louise Fink Smith, Law Bureau (via email)

Enclosure

BEFORE THE PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION

Final Policy Statement and Order Re: 2019 Amendments to Policy Statement on Customer Assistance Program, 52 Pa. Code §§ 69.261 – 69.267

Docket No. M-2019-3012599

PETITION OF THE ENERGY ASSOCIATION OF PENNSYLVANIA FOR STAY OF ORDERING PARAGRAPHS SIX, SEVEN AND EIGHT OF FINAL POLICY STATEMENT ORDER ENTERED ON NOVEMBER 5, 2019

The Energy Association of Pennsylvania ("EAP" or "Association"), acting on behalf of its electric distribution company ("EDC") and natural gas distribution company ("NDGC") members that operate an approved Universal Service and Energy Conservation Plan¹ ("USECP"), files this Petition for Stay pursuant to Section 5.572 of the regulations of the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission ("PUC" or "Commission"), 52 Pa. Code § 5.572. By this Petition, EAP and its member EDCs and NGDCs respectfully request that the Commission stay the effectiveness of Ordering Paragraphs six (6), seven (7) and eight (8) of the Final Policy Statement and Order Re: 2019 Amendments to Policy Statement on Customer Assistance Program entered on November 5, 2019 at Docket No. M-2019-3012599 ("Final Policy Statement Order") pending resolution of the Petition of the Energy Association of Pennsylvania for Reconsideration and Clarification of Final Policy Statement Order filed on November 20, 2019 ("Reconsideration/Clarification Petition").

¹ EAP EDC members operating approved USECPs include Duquesne Light Co., Metropolitan Edison Co., PECO Energy Co., Pennsylvania Electric Co., Pennsylvania Power Co., PPL Electric Utilities Inc., and West Penn Power

Co. EAP NGDC members operating approved USECPs include Columbia Gas of Pennsylvania, PECO Energy Co., National Fuel Gas Distribution Corp., Peoples Natural Gas Co., Philadelphia Gas Works, and UGI Utilities, Inc.

As set forth below, a stay is warranted to avoid the unnecessary and unlawful initiation of proceedings directed to amend utility USECPs by the filing and service of addendums to those plans on or before January 6, 2020 ("Addendum Requirement"). *See.* Final Policy Statement Order at Ordering Paragraph six (6) which provides, in pertinent part, that addendums to utility existing or proposed (if applicable) USECPs are due "at their respective dockets, in response to this Order, within sixty (60) days of entry date of this Order." The Addendum Requirement is unlawful in that it creates a compliance requirement, *i.e.* prescribes specific changes to current USECPs "by or before January 1, 2021" in the context of finalizing an order to amend a policy statement. *See, Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission v. Norristown Area School District*, 374 A.2d 671 (Pa. 1977). Issuing the requested stay will provide the Commission the opportunity to consider the relief sought in the Reconsideration/Clarification Petition without substantial harm to other interested parties who participated in the *Energy Affordability* and *Review* proceedings² and will not adversely affect the public interest.

I. BACKGROUND

On November 5, 2019, the Commission entered the Final Policy Statement Order which contains the following ordering paragraphs:

6. That the Electric Distribution Companies and Natural Gas Distribution Companies listed in Ordering Paragraph No. 5 shall file and serve addendums to their existing or proposed (if applicable) Universal Service and Energy Conservation Plans, at their respective dockets, in response to this Order, within 60 days of entry date of this Order. The addendums are to indicate how the Electric Distribution Companies and Natural Gas Distribution Companies intend to implement the policy changes specified in the amended CAP Policy Statement, numbered as in the discussion herein, by or before January 1, 2021. The Electric Distribution Companies and Natural Gas Distribution Companies

² See, Final Policy Statement Order at fn. 1 which identifies the *Energy Affordability* and *Review* proceedings at Docket No. M-2017-2587711 and Docket No. M-2017-2596907, respectively. These proceedings formed the basis for the order finalizing the recent amendments to the CAP Policy Statement.

- should indicate in the cover letter to their addendums any provisions with which they are already compliant.
- 7. That the addendums to the universal service and energy conservation plans shall be filed in both clean and redline copies and served on the parties at the utilities' respective existing or pending USECP dockets.
- 8. That the addendums to the universal service and energy conservation plans shall be provided electronically in Word®-compatible format to Joseph Magee, Bureau of Consumer Services, jmagee@pa.gov; Jennifer Johnson, Bureau of Consumer Services, jennifohn@pa.gov; Christina Chase-Pettis, Office of Communications, cchasepett@pa.gov; Shari A. Williams, Office of Communications, shariwilli@pa.gov; and Louise Fink Smith, Law Bureau, finksmith@pa.gov.

These ordering paragraphs, included in an order finalizing amendments to a policy statement, direct EDCs and NGDCs to file addendums that detail how utilities will implement sixteen (16) specific policy changes on or before January 1, 2021 and, as such, create a compliance obligation. *See also*, Final Policy Statement Order at p. 100.

EAP filed a Reconsideration/Clarification Petition simultaneously with the filing of this Petition for Stay challenging the imposition of a compliance obligation via a final policy statement and asking the Commission to rescind Ordering Paragraphs six (6), seven (7) and eight (8) from the Final Policy Statement Order. EAP requested that the Commission replace those directives with a voluntary, informational filing at the amended CAP Policy Statement docket that would detail: (1) whether each utility's current USECP already adhere to the policy changes; (2) the utility's intentions with regard to those policy changes that are not part of the current USECP (including whether such changes could be operational by January 1, 2021); and (3) the utility's enrollment and budgetary projections requested in a corollary proceeding that revised

³ Final Policy Statement Order at p. 106.

the filing schedule for USECPs and related independent evaluations.⁴ Such a voluntary, informational filing would set the stage for future utility specific USECP filings pursuant to the existing Commission rules and procedures, including the amended CAP Policy Statement.

In support of its Reconsideration/Clarification Petition, EAP contended, *inter alia*, that granting its request would address the significant legal concerns that occur under Pennsylvania law when an agency seeks to establish a binding norm or compliance obligation via a policy statement rather than through a rulemaking or adjudication. EAP argued that the practical implications and complex procedural issues that arise with the imposition of the Addendum Requirement gave further support for its request for reconsideration and/or clarification of these ordering paragraphs in the Final Policy Statement Order.

In support of its Petition for Stay, EAP states as follows:

II. APPLICABLE LEGAL STANDARD

1. In considering a petition for stay, the Commission analyzes the factors identified by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in *Pa. Public Utility Commission v. Process Gas Consumers Group*, 502 Pa. 545, 467 A.2d 805 (Pa. 1983). A stay must be granted when a petitioner: (i) makes a strong showing that they are likely to prevail on the merits; (ii) shows that without the requested relief, the petitioner will suffer irreparable injury; (iii) shows that the issuance of a stay will not substantially harm other interested parties in the proceedings; and (iv) shows that the issuance of a stay will not adversely affect the public interest. *Id.* 502 Pa. at 552-52, 467 A.2d at 808-809.

⁴ See, Order Re: Universal Service and Energy Conservation Plan (USECP) Filing Schedule and Independent Evaluation Filing Schedule, Docket No. M-2019-3012601 entered on October 3, 2019 at Ordering Paragraph three (3).

2. In *Process Gas*, the Supreme Court held that these criteria require the balancing of the interests of all parties, and the public where applicable and further require the petitioner to demonstrate probability of success on the merits. *Id*.

III. THE PETITION FOR STAY MEETS THE PROCESS GAS STANDARD

- 3. EAP and its member EDCs and NGDCs that file USECPs as required by 52 Pa. Code §54.74 and §62.4, respectively, are likely to prevail on the merits.
- 4. Policy statements, as distinguished from regulations and adjudications, do not establish binding norms and do not have the force of law. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court has likened a policy statement to a press release which announces the course an agency intends to take in the future. The amended CAP Policy Statement provides insight and notice to the public of policy changes that the Commission intends to follow in the future. The Addendum Requirement, however, creates directives and compliance obligations that mandate each utility to proceed "to implement the policy changes specified in the amended CAP Policy Statement...by or before January 1, 2021. *See*, Final Policy Statement Order at Ordering Paragraph six (6).
- 5. The creation of a general compliance obligation in the order finalizing the amendments to a policy statement is contrary to Pennsylvania law which allows agencies to adopt binding norms in two ways, either by rulemaking or adjudication. *Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission v. Norristown Area School District*, 374 A.2d 671, 678-80 (Pa. 1977). Appellate courts in Pennsylvania have struck down agency decisions that rested upon documents that created binding norms outside of a rulemaking or adjudication. These decisions have relied upon the

⁵ Pa. Human Relations Commission v. Norristown Area School District, 374 A.2d 671 (Pa. 1977).

⁶ See, e.g., Nw. Youth Srvs., Inc. v. Commw. Dep't of Pub. Welfare, 66 A.3d 301, 316-17 (Pa. 2013); Trans. Servs., Inc. v. Underground Storage Tank Indemnification Bd., 67 A.3d 142, 155-56 (Pa. Commw. Ct. 2013).

distinction between regulations, which are binding, and statements of policy, which are not enforceable.

- 6. Without the requested relief, EDCs and NGDCs ordered to meet the Addendum Requirement will suffer irreparable harm. Ordering Paragraphs six (6), seven (7) and eight (8) of the Final Policy Statement Order mandate action by January 1, 2020 that is not authorized by Pennsylvania law. The Commission cannot create a binding norm via an unlawful process and thus cannot order the initiation of a process by the utility (as opposed to a utility voluntarily seeking to amend its current USECP) that would prescribe the inclusion and implementation of specific policy changes into the utility USECP by a date certain. A violation of law constitutes irreparable harm *per se. See, Core Communications, Inc. v. Verizon Pennsylvania Inc., Verizon North LLC*, 2011 Pa. PUC LEXIS 72 at 24 (Pa. PUC 2011) citing *Pa. Public Utility Commission v. Israel*, 52 A.2d 347 (Pa. 1947). Here, if the requested stay is not granted and EDCs and NGDCs comply with the Addendum Requirement, the concerns raised and the relief requested in the Reconsideration/Clarification Petition will be moot.
- 7. The issuance of the requested stay will not substantially harm other interested parties which participated in the *Energy Affordability* and *Review* proceedings underlying the Final Policy Statement Order. The Reconsideration/Clarification Petition does not challenge the substantive amendments to the CAP Policy Statement finalized by the Commission in its Final Policy Statement Order. By issuing the requested stay of Ordering Paragraphs six (6), seven (7) and eight (8), the Commission will maintain the status quo. The amendments to the CAP Policy Statement will become effective upon its publication in the *Pennsylvania Bulletin*; those policy changes will provide guidance to the utilities and other interested parties with respect to specific

policy changes that the Commission intends to follow in future utility specific USECP proceedings; and the timing of those utility specific proceedings is known.⁷

8. The issuance of the requested stay will not adversely affect the public interest and will benefit the public interest by providing an opportunity for the Commission to consider the merits of the Reconsideration/Clarification Petition. In so doing, the Commission can address the legal errors and unwarranted procedural complexity embodied in Ordering Paragraphs Six (6), Seven (7) and Eight (8) without delaying the effectiveness of its policy changes. EAP maintains that issuance of its request for stay is consistent with the public interest to: (i) promote an efficient and fair process to update USECPs and (ii) support an orderly and judicious implementation of the amended CAP Policy Statement. Utilizing the proven utility specific process to periodically review and update USECPs will provide an ample opportunity to assess the operational and cost concerns that are likely to arise in the context of implementing the amended CAP Policy Statement. A case by case approach will facilitate the resolution of CAP design elements taking into account the interests of participants and ratepayers unique to each service territory.

IV. CONCLUSION

For the reasons set forth above, the Energy Association of Pennsylvania, on behalf of its EDC and NDGC members that operate an approved Universal Service and Energy Conservation Plan, respectfully requests that the Commission grant this Petition and order a stay of Ordering Paragraphs six (6), seven (7) and eight (8) of the Final Policy Statement Order pending

⁷ Currently, there are utility specific USECP proceedings pending at the Commission and the Commission has recently issued an order modifying the regulatory schedule for filing updates to USECPs. *Order Re: Universal Service and Energy Conservation Plan (USECP) Filing Schedule and Independent Evaluation Filing Schedule*, Docket No. M-2019-3012601 entered on October 3, 2019. Moreover, EAP notes that neither the Reconsideration/Clarification Petition nor the Petition for Stay precludes a utility from voluntarily proceeding to amend its current USECP and implement the design changes detailed in the amended CAP Policy Statement.

resolution of Reconsideration/Clarification Petition and for such other relief as the Commission deems necessary and proper under the circumstances presented herein.

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Date: November 20, 2019

Certificate of Service

I hereby certify that I am this day serving, via email, a true copy of the foregoing document upon the participants listed below in accordance with the requirements of 52 Pa. Code Section 1.54 (relating to service by a participant).

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