

**PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION
HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA 17105**

Verdell Reese
v.
Philadelphia Gas Works

Public Meeting: March 2, 2017
2508207-OSA
Docket No. P-2015-2508207

STATEMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN ANDREW G. PLACE

Before us today are the Exceptions of the Complainant, Verdell Reese, and the Philadelphia Gas Works' (PGW or Company) Reply Exceptions in the above matter. The Complainant was terminated on or around April 1, 2015 for lack of payment. At the time of termination, the Complainant's arrearages were approximately \$25,000.

This case presents very unfortunate circumstances on the part of the Complainant as well as the Company. The Complainant indicates that she is 75 years old, has a medical condition, is blind in one eye and walks with a cane. Complaint at 2. The Complainant indicates, and the Company admits, that the Complainant's account balance was approximately \$9,000 in 2014 but the account balance at the time of termination in April 2015 was approximately \$25,000 because the Complainant's previous bankruptcy was dismissed resulting in \$12,711.63 being transferred to Ms. Reese's account. Complaint at 3, PGW Answer at 1.

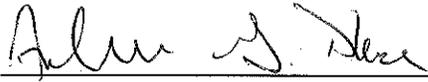
It is unfortunate that the record in this proceeding does not include the efforts of the Commission to provide a telephonic hearing for the Complainant. The Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) issued a Hearing Notice on November 13, 2015 setting an Initial In Person Hearing on Tuesday, January 12, 2016. At the January 2016 hearing, the ALJ indicated that she had no record that the Complainant requested a telephonic hearing. Tr. 5. Although it is incumbent upon the Complainant to make a request for a telephonic hearing, Ms. Reese's Complaint contained statements that indicate that she may not have been physically able to appear for an in person hearing.

Also, the record in the proceeding does not reflect the efforts of the Company to work with the Complainant to address her significant arrearages when they began to accrue. The record indicates that the Complainant lived at the property since 1990 and it is reasonable to believe that there must have been a point in time when Ms. Reese could have and may have been helped through the Company's CARES or CRP programs and other available social services. However, the record does not contain this information. I am interested in being briefed by the Company

on their efforts to mitigate high arrearage accounts and other measures that PGW takes to assist customers who often struggle to pay for essential utility services.

Although we are unable to grant the relief requested by the Complainant in this proceeding, this case again highlights the series of complaints that we consider with too great frequency involving residents failing to keep up with payments, accumulating arrearages, and facing service disconnection. This utility payment, assistance and arrearage cycle is a perpetual issue for many low-income customers.

Dated: March 2, 2017



Andrew G. Place, Vice Chairman