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April 12, 2018

VIA E-FILING

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

Re: Susan J. Lambert v. West Penn Power Company
Docket No. C-2018-3000647

Dear Secretary Chiavetta:

Attached please find the Preliminary Objections of West Penn Power Company in the above-referenced matter. This document has been served on the Complainant as shown in the Certificate of Service.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

Very truly yours,


Lauren M. Lepkoski

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Enclosures

c: As per Certificate of Service

**BEFORE THE
PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION**

SUSAN J. LAMBERT

v.

WEST PENN POWER COMPANY

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:

Docket No. C-2018-3000647

NOTICE TO PLEAD

TO: Susan J. Lambert

Pursuant to 52 Pa. Code § 5.101 you are hereby notified that if you do not file a reply to the enclosed Preliminary Objections of West Penn Power Company within ten (10) days from service of this notice, the facts set forth by West Penn Power Company in the Preliminary Objections may be deemed to be admitted, thereby requiring no other proof. All pleadings, such as a Reply to Objection, must be filed with the Secretary of the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission, with a copy service to counsel for West Penn Power Company, and where applicable, the Administrative Law Judge presiding over the case.


File with:

Rosemary Chiavetta, Secretary
Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission
P.O. Box 3265
Harrisburg, PA 17105-3265

With a copy to:

Lauren M. Lepkoski
Tori L. Giesler
FirstEnergy Service Company
2800 Pottsville Pike
P.O. Box 16001
Reading, Pennsylvania 19612-6001

Date: April 12, 2018


Lauren M. Lepkoski, Esquire
Tori L. Giesler, Esquire

**BEFORE THE
PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION**

SUSAN J. LAMBERT	:	
	:	
v.	:	Docket No. C-2018-3000647
	:	
WEST PENN POWER COMPANY	:	

**PRELIMINARY OBJECTION TO THE FORMAL COMPLAINT OF
SUSAN J. LAMBERT**

TO THE PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION:

AND NOW, West Penn Power Company ("West Penn" or the "Company"), by and through its counsel, Lauren M. Lepkoski and Tori L. Giesler, files this Preliminary Objection pursuant to Section 5.101(a) of Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission ("Commission") regulations, 52 Pa. Code § 5.101(a)(1), and in support thereof, avers as follows:

I. Introduction

1. In her recently filed Formal Complaint, Susan J. Lambert ("Complainant"), who resides at 638 Bank Street, Bridgeville, Pennsylvania 15017 ("Service Location") alleges that she does not want a smart meter installed at the Service Location. (Formal Complaint ¶¶ 4, 5.) The Complainant states as requested relief:

I would like to opt out of having a smart meter installed on my house. The utility company has told me that is not an option and if I don't comply, my electric service could be shut off. I've offered to pay extra on my bill for a meter reader, as I realize an analog meter needs to be read regularly. The research I've done on smart meters has me deeply concerned for several reasons. There have been many reports of electrical fires after installation of a smart meter, especially on older homes, all over the country. My home is 106 years old, so I would have zero peace of mind in that regard. I don't know how I would be able to sleep at night knowing there's that potential. The RF exposure from smart meters can be the same as living within 200-600 feet of a cell phone tower, and that exposure is 24/7, unlike temporary exposure from cell phones, microwaves, TVs, etc. I purposely looked to purchase a home that was NOT close to a cell phone tower because that concerned me. I work at home and my office sits about 9 feet directly above

our meter. I am extremely conscientious regarding our home environment. I only use green cleaning products, buy organically grown foods whenever possible, use air filtration systems to remove any out-gassing from furniture or carpeting, etc. and a water filtration system as well. Our home is our sanctuary; the only place we have any real control over its environment. I'm essentially being told by the utility company that PA law (Act 129) supersedes my right to protect my family's and my own health and well-being. There have been reports of astronomical utility bills from smart meters and there are concerns regarding the possibility for hacking by unfriendly governments. I realize not everyone shares my concerns, just as not everyone cares about the chemicals they use in their homes and their environmental impact, or what foods they put in their bodies, but there needs to be an opt-out option for those of us who are not convinced that smart meters are safe. We should be allowed to have peace of mind at least in our own homes. The resolution I'm seeking is for an option to refuse be available, not just myself, but for anyone who is not comfortable with having a smart meter installed on their home.

(Formal Complaint ¶ 5.)

2. The Company is in the process of deploying smart meters in its service territory in accordance with Act 129 of 2008 ("Act 129").¹

3. On January 9, 2018, the Company sent correspondence to the Complainant regarding the installation of a smart meter at the Service Location. On February 27, 2018, the Company received notification from Wellington Energy, a contractor for the Company, that on February 23, 2018, the Complainant refused installation of the smart meter. On February 28, 2018, the Company attempted to contact the Complainant regarding her refusal to discuss the smart meter and to answer any questions she may have regarding the meter, and a message was left requesting a return telephone call. On March 1, 2018, the Company issued a letter stating that the Company was attempting to reach the Complainant to discuss the installation of the smart meter. On March 6, 2018, the Complainant contacted the Company again refusing installation of the smart meter

¹ 66 Pa.C.S. § 2806.1 *et seq.* Among other things, Act 129 specifically directed that electric distribution companies with at least 100,000 customers file a smart meter technology procurement and installation plan with the Commission for approval. 66 Pa.C.S. § 2807(f)(1) and (2).

stating that she would like to opt-out. The Company representative advised the Complainant that there is no opt-out available and that the smart meter is being installed pursuant to Act 129.² The Company representative provided answers to the Complainant's questions and the Complainant stated that she was still refusing installation of the smart meter. The Complainant indicated that she was not satisfied with the result of her telephone call and dispute rights were provided. On March 12, 2018, the Complainant filed the instant Formal Complaint with the Commission and, on March 23, 2018, the Company was served with the Formal Complaint.

4. As explained in greater detail below, even if all of the facts in the Formal Complaint are accepted as true, they do not constitute a violation of any law which the Commission has jurisdiction to administer, or of any regulation or order of the Commission, such that relief can be granted. *See* 66 Pa.C.S. § 701.

5. As a result, the Company requests that this Preliminary Objection be granted and that the Commission: (1) strike the Complainant's request for an exemption from the installation of a smart meter for herself and for "anyone who is not comfortable with having a smart meter installed on their home;" (2) dismiss the Formal Complaint in its entirety with prejudice; and (3) grant the Company such other relief as may be just and reasonable under the circumstances.

II. Background

6. West Penn is an electric distribution company that is certificated as a public utility in Pennsylvania.

7. On January 9, 2018, the Company sent correspondence to the Complainant regarding the installation of a smart meter at the Service Location. On February 27, 2018, the Company received notification from Wellington Energy, a contractor for the Company, that on

² 66 Pa.C.S. § 2806.1 *et seq.*

February 23, 2018, the Complainant refused installation of the smart meter. On February 28, 2018, the Company attempted to contact the Complainant regarding her refusal to discuss the smart meter and to answer any questions she may have regarding the meter, and a message was left requesting a return telephone call. On March 1, 2018, the Company issued a letter stating that the Company was attempting to reach the Complainant to discuss the installation of the smart meter. On March 6, 2018, the Complainant contacted the Company again refusing installation of the smart meter stating that she would like to opt-out. The Company representative advised the Complainant that there is no opt-out available and that the smart meter is being installed pursuant to Act 129.³ The Company representative provided answers to the Complainant's questions and the Complainant stated that she was still refusing installation of the smart meter. The Complainant indicated that she was not satisfied with the result of her telephone call and dispute rights were provided.

8. On March 12, 2018, the Complainant filed the instant Formal Complaint with the Commission and, on March 23, 2018, the Company was served with the Formal Complaint.

9. West Penn is timely filing its Answer and New Matter contemporaneously with this Preliminary Objection, which Answer and New Matter is incorporated into this Preliminary Objection as if fully set forth herein.

III. Argument

10. The Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure permit parties to file preliminary objections. The grounds for preliminary objections are limited to those set forth in 52 Pa. Code § 5.101(a) as follows:

- (1) Lack of Commission jurisdiction or improper service of the pleading initiating the proceeding.
- (2) Failure of a pleading to conform to this chapter or the inclusion of scandalous or impertinent matter.

³ 66 Pa.C.S. § 2806.1 *et seq.*

- (3) Insufficient specificity of a pleading.
- (4) Legal insufficiency of a pleading.
- (5) Lack of capacity to sue, nonjoinder of a necessary party or misjoinder of a cause of action.
- (6) Pendency of a prior proceeding or agreement for alternative dispute resolution.
- (7) Standing of a party to participate in the proceeding.

11 The Commission's procedure regarding the disposition of preliminary objections is similar to that utilized in Pennsylvania civil practice. *Equitable Small Transportation Intervenors v. Equitable Gas Company*, Docket No. C-00935435 (Opinion and Order entered July 18, 1994).

12. A preliminary objection in civil practice seeking dismissal of a pleading will be granted only where relief is clearly warranted and free from doubt. *Interstate Traveler Services, Inc. v. Pa. Dept. of Environmental Resources*, 406 A.2d 1020 (Pa. 1979); *Rivera v. Philadelphia Theological Seminary of St. Charles Borromeo, Inc.*, 595 A.2d 172 (Pa. Super. 1991). The Commission has adopted this standard. *Montague v. Philadelphia Electric Company*, 66 Pa. PUC 24 (1988).

13. In accordance with Section 701 of the Code, 66 Pa.C.S. § 701, a person may file a complaint which sets forth "any act or thing done or omitted to be done by any public utility in violation, or claimed violation, of any law which the commission has jurisdiction to administer, or of any regulation or order of the commission." As explained below, the Company has not violated the Public Utility Code or the orders or regulations of the Commission.⁴ In fact, the Company's action have been in compliance with Act 129 and the June 5 Order. Further, the Complainant does not have standing to file a complaint or request relief on behalf of other customers who are "not comfortable" with smart meter installation.

⁴ 66 Pa.C.S. § 701.

14. The moving party may not rely on its own factual assertions, but must accept for the purposes of disposition of the preliminary objection, all well-pleaded, material facts of the other party, as well as every inference fairly deducible from those facts. *County of Allegheny v. Commw. of Pa.*, 490 A.2d 402 (Pa. 1985). Therefore, in ruling on a preliminary objection, the Commission must assume, for decisional purposes only, that the factual allegations of the Formal Complaint are true. *Id.*

A. Preliminary Objection Regarding Lack of Standing Pursuant to 52 Pa. Code § 5.101(a)(1).

15. The Commission's procedural regulations allow a party to object to pleadings that are filed by complainants who lack the capacity to sue as well as complainants who lack standing to participate in a proceeding. *See* 52 Pa. Code § 5.102(a)(7).

16. The Complainant states as part of her requested relief that the resolution she is seeking is for an option to refuse be available not only to her, but anyone who is not "comfortable" with having a smart meter installed.

17. The Complainant lacks standing and capacity to file or to prosecute a complaint related to other ratepayers.

18. The Commission has held that a person or entity has standing when the person or entity has a direct, immediate and substantial interest in the subject matter of a proceeding. *Joint Application of Pennsylvania-American Water Co. and Evansburg Water Co. for Approval of the transfer, by sale, of the water works property and rights of Evansburg Water Co. to Pennsylvania-American Water Co.*, A-212285F0046/47 and A-210870F01 (Ordered entered July 9, 1998); *William Penn Parking Garage, Inc. v. City of Pittsburgh*, 464 Pa. 168, 346 A.2d 269 (1975); *Landlord Service Bureau, Inc. v. Equitable Gas Co.*, 79 Pa. P.U.C. 342 (1993); *Re Equitable Gas Co.*, 76 Pa. P.U.C. 23 (1992); *Manufacturers' Association of Erie v. City of Erie - Bureau of Water*,

50 Pa. P.U.C. 43 (1976); *Waddington v. Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission*, 670 A.2d 199 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1995), *alloc. denied*, 678 A.2d 368 (Pa. 1996).

19. Requiring a person or entity to have a direct, immediate and substantial interest in the subject matter of a proceeding helps avoid frivolous, harassing lawsuits whose costs are ultimately borne, at least in part, by utility ratepayers. *NFG, supra*.

B. Preliminary Objection Regarding Insufficiency of a Pleading Pursuant to 52 Pa. Code § 5.101(a)(4).

20. West Penn’s smart meter deployment plan was approved by the Commission at Docket No. M-2013-2341991 by Order entered June 5, 2014. In accordance with the June 5 Order, the Company filed its final Smart Meter Deployment Plan (“SMP”) on June 16, 2014. The SMP was approved by the Commission on June 20, 2014. The Complainant challenges no aspect of the Company’s provision of electric service other than the installation of a smart meter at the Service Location, as required by Act 129 and the Company’s SMP.

21. Commission precedent is uniform that it cannot grant exceptions to the statutory directive that smart meters be installed by allowing customers to opt out.⁵

22. Assuming the facts pleaded in the Formal Complaint are true, as the Commission must for the purposes of ruling on a preliminary objection, the Complainant has failed to allege that West Penn has committed or omitted an act in violation of a Commission statute, regulation,

⁵ *Negley v. Metropolitan Edison Company*, Docket No. C-2010-2205305 (Final Order entered March 3, 2011); *Lutherschmidt v. Metropolitan Edison Company*, Docket No. C-2010-2200353 (Final Order entered March 25, 2011). The Commission has continued to uphold installation of smart meters and imposition of smart meter charges on customers’ bills by dismissing complaints opposing installation of smart meters and imposition of smart meter charges on the basis of legal insufficiency. *Corbett v. Pennsylvania Power Company*, Docket No. C-2011-2219898 (Final Order entered May 27, 2011); *Jones v. Metropolitan Edison Company*, Docket No. C-2011-2224380 (Final Order entered June 28, 2011); *Griffin v. Metropolitan Edison Company*, Docket No. C-2012-2300172 (Final Order entered July 31, 2012); *Brake v. West Penn Power Company*, Docket No. C-2013-2367308 (Opinion and Order entered November 14, 2013); *Drake v. Pennsylvania Electric Company*, Docket No. C-2014-2413771 (Final Order entered June 12, 2014); *Efaw v West Penn Power Company*, Docket No. C-2014-2413744 (Final Order entered June 12, 2014). See also, the Initial Decision of ALJ Susan D. Colwell in *Dennis McElwain v. Pennsylvania Power Company*, Docket No. C-2014-2451478 issued December 16, 2015.

order, or West Penn's tariff, a finding of which must be made in order to sustain a formal complaint. *See* 66 Pa.C.S. § 701; *County of Allegheny*, *supra*. (Compl. ¶ 4).

23. Because Act 129 and the Commission's orders not only authorize but require the Company to develop and implement a smart meter procurement and installation plan, and do not allow a customer to opt out of having a smart meter installed, this Complaint must be dismissed. As a matter of law, the Company is required to install a smart meter at the Service Location. As such, the Commission cannot find the Company to be in violation for having attempted to follow the law as it has done here.

24. Therefore, the Formal Complaint is legally insufficient because it fails to state a claim upon which the Commission can grant relief. *See* 52 Pa. Code § 5.101(a)(4).

25. The Commission may dismiss a complaint without hearing if a hearing is not necessary in the public interest. 66 Pa.C.S. § 703(b); 52 Pa. Code § 5.21 (d).

26. Recently, the Commission set for hearing two cases in which the complainant was opposed to the installation of a smart meter at their premises.⁶ These cases represent a departure from past Commission practice of dismissing such complaints on Preliminary Objections. The Commission stated that where a complainant has presented specific factual averments regarding the health or other effects that they have experienced after a smart meter was installed at their home, the Commission has overruled Preliminary Objections and allowed a case to proceed. Specifically, in *Kreider*, the complainant alleged specific deleterious health effects after installation of a smart meter affecting her specific medical condition. Further, in *Van Schoyck*, the complainants alleged potential health risks due to constant ringing noise in their home and their

⁶ *Susan Kreider v. PECO Energy Company*, Docket No. C-2015-2469655 (Order on Reconsideration entered January 28, 2016); *Stephen and Diane Van Schoyck v. PECO Energy Company*, Docket No. C-2015-2478239 (Opinion and Order entered February 25, 2016).

inability to sleep since the time the smart meter was installed.⁷ In contrast, in the instant case, the Complainant has made no specific factual averments regarding any effects experienced which began *after* a smart meter was installed. Furthermore, the Complainant only states that she opt out of having a smart meter installed at the Service Location because she has “concerns” about the smart meter being installed at her home. The Commission has not recognized a customer’s lack of consent to install a smart meter as sufficient to overcome Preliminary Objections.⁸

27. In *Charles F. Jackson v. Pennsylvania Electric Company*, Docket No. C-2017-2600495 (Order Entered August 31, 2017), the Commission approved the Initial Decision of ALJ David A. Salapa, dated June 26, 2017, which granted the Preliminary Objections of Pennsylvania Electric Company and dismissed the formal complaint of Mr. Jackson (who was disputing the installation of a smart meter) finding that formal complaint was legally insufficient, pursuant to 52 Pa. Code § 5.101(a)(4), in that the complaint fails to allege that the utility violated the Public Utility Code, Commission regulations or orders or its tariff provisions. The respondent was found to be authorized to install smart meters and impose a charge on its customers to develop and implement a smart meter procurement and installation plan that will lead to the installation of smart meters throughout its service territory. ALJ Salapa further found that the respondent was authorized to terminate the Mr. Jackson’s service if he refused to provide the respondent with access to its meter and equipment to install the smart meter.

This Commission decision was entered after *Kreider*. The instant formal complaint is similar to the alleged averments in the formal complaint at Docket No. C-2017-2600495, in that the Complainant has only alleged that she does not want a smart meter at the Service Location.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Richard and Marie Fugo in care of Fugo Eye Institute v. PECO Energy Company*, Docket Nos. C-2015-2519763 and C-2015-2519770 (Order entered April 6, 2016).

The Complainant has not set forth in her complaint that any act done by the Company violates a Commission regulation, statute or order.

28. Therefore, the Company respectfully submits that the matters plead in the subject Formal Complaint do not meet the standards set in the *Kreider* and *Van Schoyck* cases such that this matter can survive dismissal on preliminary objections.

29. Further, the Commission has upheld decisions granting preliminary objections and dismissing complaints for legal insufficiency opposing smart meter installation. In *Richard Negley v. Metropolitan Edison Company*, Docket No. C-2010-2205305 (Initial Decision issued January 3, 2011), ALJ Susan D. Colwell dismissed a complaint opposing installation of smart meters for legal insufficiency. ALJ Colwell concluded that Act 129 of 2008 authorized the installation of smart meters by EDCs. ALJ Colwell held that the Commission's orders approving the EDC's smart meter plans did not exempt any customers from the smart meter plans. By Commission final order entered March 3, 2011, ALJ Colwell's Initial Decision became final without further Commission action.

30. Rule 9 of the Company's Commission- approved Tariff⁹, allows the Company to have access to its customers' premises for any and all purposes relating to the supply of electric energy which includes the exchange of meters. The Complainants refusal to allow the Company access to its own meter is a violation of Rules 9 and 20 of the Company's Commission-approved Tariff¹⁰ and is grounds for termination of service. The Commission has also upheld decisions finding that a utility has the ability to terminate the service of a customer who refuses installation

⁹ *West Penn Power Company Retail Electric Service Tariff*, Electric Pa. PUC No. 52, p. 40 issued May 1, 2015, effective May 3, 2015.

¹⁰ *West Penn Power Company Retail Electric Service Tariff*, Electric Pa. PUC No. 52, pp. 40, 55, issued May 1, 2015, effective May 3, 2015.

of a smart meter. *Art Larson v. PECO Energy Company*; Docket No. C-2014-2451754 (Opinion and Order entered June 11, 2015).


31. Because Act 129 of 2008 and the Commission's orders authorize the Company to develop and implement a smart meter procurement and installation plan, the Complainant has not set forth in his complaint any act done by the Company that violates a Commission regulation, statute or order.

IV. Conclusion

WHEREFORE, for the foregoing reasons, West Penn Power Company respectfully requests that the Commission: (1) strike the Complainant's request for an exemption from the installation of a smart meter for herself and for "anyone who is not comfortable with having a smart meter installed on their home;" (2) dismiss the Formal Complaint in its entirety with prejudice; and (3) grant the Company such other relief as may be just and reasonable under the circumstances.

Respectfully submitted,

Dated: April 12, 2018


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Counsel for West Penn Power Company

**BEFORE THE
PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION**

SUSAN J. LAMBERT

v.

WEST PENN POWER COMPANY

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Docket No. C-2018-3000647

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that I have this day served a true copy of the Preliminary Objections of West Penn Power Company to the Formal Complaint of Susan J. Lambert upon the individuals listed below, in accordance with the requirements of 52 Pa. Code § 1.54 (relating to service by a participant).

Service by First Class Mail, postage prepaid, as follows:

Susan J. Lambert
638 Bank Street
Bridgeville, PA 15017

Dated: April 12, 2018


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