

**BEFORE THE
PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION**

Marietta Deshields	:	
	:	
v.	:	F-2017-2636276
	:	
Philadelphia Gas Works	:	

INITIAL DECISION

Before
Darlene Davis Heep
Administrative Law Judge

INTRODUCTION

The Complainant did not appear for the hearing and the formal Complaint (Complaint) is dismissed for failure to prosecute.

HISTORY OF THE PROCEEDING

On December 1, 2017, Marietta Deshields (Complainant) filed a Complaint with the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (Commission) against Philadelphia Gas Works (PGW or Respondent). In the Complaint, Marietta Deshields sought a payment arrangement. This is a timely appeal of the Bureau of Consumer Services (BCS) decision, Case Number 3565978.

On December 21, 2017, PGW filed an Answer denying all material allegations of fact in the Complaint. PGW also stated that on October 18, 2017, Complainant was awarded a payment arrangement by the Commission's BCS.

On January 25, 2018, a Hearing Notice was issued setting an Initial Hearing for April 5, 2018, at 9:30 a.m. and served on all parties.

On February 1, 2018, a Prehearing Order was issued and served on all parties. The Prehearing Order reminded the parties of the hearing date and time. The Prehearing Order also stated that the matter would be dismissed if the Complainant failed to appear, that any requests for a continuance must be submitted in writing five days in advance and that a change of the hearing date would be granted only where good cause existed. The Prehearing Order also advised the Complainant to arrive in the hearing room at 9:15 a.m.

The hearing began as scheduled at 9:30 a.m. on April 5, 2018. Counsel for PGW appeared at the hearing with witnesses and was prepared to proceed. The Complainant was not present. The hearing was recessed to allow the Complainant time to appear.

At 9:40 a.m., the hearing resumed, and the Complainant had not made an appearance. Counsel for PGW moved that the matter be dismissed for failure to prosecute.

The record closed on April 19, 2018, upon receipt of the transcript. This decision grants the Respondent's Motion to Dismiss the Complaint.

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The Complainant is Marietta Deshields, who is a PGW gas customer at 2207 Tyson Avenue, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
2. Philadelphia Gas Works is the Respondent.
3. On December 1, 2017, the Complainant filed this action.
4. The Respondent filed an Answer on December 21, 2017.

5. By Notice dated January 25, 2018, the Commission scheduled an Initial Hearing for April 5, 2018, at 9:30 a.m.

6. On February 1, 2018, a Prehearing Order was mailed to the Complainant, which reminded her of the hearing date, time and location and stated as follows:

THIS CASE WILL BE DISMISSED IF THE CUSTOMER FAILS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE HEARING AND PRESENT EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT OF THE COMPLAINT.

and

A request for a change of the scheduled hearing date must state the agreement or opposition of other parties and must be submitted in writing no later than five (5) business days prior to the hearing. 52 Pa.Code § 1.15(b). Requests for changes of hearing dates must be sent to me and all parties of record.

...

Changes are granted only in rare situations where good cause exists.

7. The Complainant did not appear for the hearing.
8. All hearing notices and prehearing orders to the Complainant were sent by first-class mail.
9. The documents mailed to the Complainant were not returned as undeliverable.
10. The Complainant did not contact the Commission to request a continuance or to state that she could not attend the hearing for any other reason after the scheduled hearing date.

DISCUSSION

Administrative agencies, such as the Commission, are required to provide due process to the parties appearing before them. *Schneider v. Pa. Pub. Util. Comm'n.*, 479 A.2d 10 (Pa.Cmwlth. 1984). This due process requirement is satisfied, however, when the administrative agency provides the parties notice and the opportunity to be heard.

The Complainant was sent all notices by first-class mail to the last known address of the Complainant. None of those notices was returned as undeliverable. Therefore, the due process requirement of notice was met.

The Complainant did not appear for the scheduled hearing and has not contacted the Commission since. Under these circumstances, the Complainant has had ample opportunity to appear and be heard in this proceeding. Therefore, the due process rights of the Complainant have been fully protected. *Sentner v. Bell Telephone Co. of Pa.*, Docket No. F-00161106 (Opinion and Order entered October 25, 1993); 52 Pa.Code § 5.245(a).

Finally, Section 332(a) of the Public Utility Code, 66 Pa.C.S. § 332(a), places the burden of proof upon the proponent of any request for relief. As the party bringing this Complaint, the Complainant bears the burden of proving by a preponderance of the evidence that she is entitled to relief. By failing to appear and proffer any evidence to support the Complaint, the Complainant has failed to meet this burden. Therefore, the Complaint should be dismissed with prejudice. *Jefferson v. UGI Utilities, Inc.*, Docket No. Z-00269892 (Opinion and Order entered December 26, 1995); *El-Ayazra v. West Penn Power Company*, Docket No. F 2015-2509292 (Opinion and Order entered June 30, 2016); 52 Pa.Code § 5.245.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

1. The Commission has jurisdiction over the subject matter and the parties to this proceeding. 66 Pa.C.S. § 701.

2. Notice mailed to a party's last known address and not returned by the post office is presumed to have been received. *Chartiers Industrial and Commercial Development Authority v. Allegheny County Board of Property Assessment Appeals and Review*, 645 A.2d 944 (Pa.Cmwlth. 1994), appeal denied, 653 A.2d 1234 (Pa. 1994).

3. The due process rights of the Complainant have been fully protected in this proceeding. *Sentner v. Bell Telephone Co. of Pa.*, Docket No. F-00161106 (Opinion and Order entered October 25, 1993); 52 Pa.Code § 5.245(a).

4. As the party seeking affirmative relief from the Commission, the Complainant bears the burden of proof. 66 Pa.C.S. § 332(a).

5. By failing to appear for the hearing and proffer any evidence to support the Complaint, the Complainant has failed to meet the burden of proving entitlement to the relief that is sought from the Commission. 66 Pa.C.S. § 332(a).

ORDER

THEREFORE,

IT IS ORDERED:

1. That the motion of Philadelphia Gas Works to dismiss the Complaint filed by Marietta Deshields at Docket No. F-2017-2636276 is granted.

2. That the Complaint of Marietta Deshields against Philadelphia Gas Works at Docket No. F-2017-2636276 is dismissed with prejudice for failure of the Complainant to appear for the hearing and prosecute the Complaint.

