

**BEFORE THE
PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION**

Tiara Murray	:	
	:	
v.	:	F-2017-2639882
	:	
Philadelphia Gas Works	:	

INITIAL DECISION

Before
Eranda Vero
Administrative Law Judge

INTRODUCTION

This Initial Decision grants Philadelphia Gas Works’ Motion to Dismiss the formal Complaint (Complaint) of Tiara Murray with prejudice because she failed to appear and prosecute the case.

HISTORY OF THE PROCEEDING

On December 20, 2017, Tiara Murray (Ms. Murray or Complainant) filed a Complaint against Philadelphia Gas Works (Respondent or PGW) with the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (Commission) alleging that the utility is threatening to shut off her gas service, and that she is unable to pay her gas bills to PGW. As relief, Ms. Murray requested that the Commission establish a payment arrangement on her behalf.

The Complaint was filed as a timely appeal of the Commission’s Bureau of Consumer Services (BCS) decision, at BCS Case # 3574072.

On January 17, 2018, Respondent filed an Answer denying the material allegations of the Complaint.

A Hearing Notice dated February 5, 2018, notified the parties that an initial hearing was scheduled in this matter for Monday, April 2, 2018, at 10:00 a.m.

A Prehearing Order was issued on March 9, 2018, advising the parties of the date and time of the scheduled hearing, informing them of the procedures applicable to the proceeding, and directing the submission of documents prior to the hearing.

On March 28, 2018, Ms. Murray submitted a written request for a continuance of the scheduled hearing in order to obtain legal representation.

Also, on March 28, 2018, PGW's attorney in this matter, Graciela Christlieb, Esq., submitted the Respondent's objections to Ms. Murray's request for a continuance.

By Order dated March 29, 2018, I granted Ms. Murray's request for a continuance of the scheduled hearing.

A Hearing Cancellation/Reschedule Notice dated April 5, 2018, notified the parties that the initial hearing in this matter was rescheduled for Tuesday, May 15, 2018, at 10:00 a.m.

The hearing convened as scheduled on May 15, 2018. Graciela Christlieb, Esq., appeared representing PGW. Neither Complainant nor a counsel for the Complainant appeared at the hearing. The hearing convened at approximately 10:28 a.m. after I confirmed that the Complainant had not called, or otherwise shown good cause not to appear at the scheduled hearing.

Counsel for PGW moved to dismiss the Complaint with prejudice for lack of prosecution. That Motion is granted pursuant to the ordering paragraphs below.

The record was closed on May 15, 2018.

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The Complainant is Tiara Murray, whose mailing address is 6510 Saybrook Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19142.
2. The Respondent is Philadelphia Gas Works.
3. On December 20, 2017, Ms. Murray filed a formal Complaint against PGW alleging that the utility is threatening to shut off her gas service, and that she is unable to pay her gas bills to PGW.
4. As relief, Ms. Murray requested that the Commission establish a payment arrangement on her behalf.
5. On January 17, 2018, the Respondent filed an Answer denying the material allegations of the Complaint.
6. A Hearing Notice dated February 5, 2018, notified the parties that an initial hearing was scheduled in this matter for Monday, April 2, 2018, at 10:00 a.m.
7. A Prehearing Order was issued on March 9, 2018, advising the parties of the date and time of the scheduled hearing, informing them of the procedures applicable to the proceeding, and directing the submission of documents prior to the hearing.
8. On March 28, 2018, Ms. Murray submitted a written request for a continuance of the scheduled hearing in order to obtain legal representation.
9. By Order dated March 29, 2018, I granted Ms. Murray's request for a continuance of the scheduled hearing.

10. A Hearing Cancellation/Reschedule Notice dated April 5, 2018, notified the parties that the initial hearing in this matter was rescheduled for Tuesday, May 15, 2018, at 10:00 a.m.

11. None of the documents mailed to Complainant at the address provided in her Complaint were returned to the Commission by the United States Postal Service as undeliverable.

12. The Complainant failed to appear at the scheduled hearing.

13. The Complainant did not settle or withdraw this Complaint prior to the scheduled hearing date or obtain a continuance.

DISCUSSION

In this formal Complaint, Ms. Murray alleged that the utility is threatening to shut off her gas service, and that she is unable to pay her gas bills to PGW. As relief, Ms. Murray requested that the Commission establish a payment arrangement on her behalf. As the party seeking affirmative relief from the Commission, the burden of proof rests on the Complainant. 66 Pa.C.S.A. § 332(a).

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

A Hearing Notice dated February 5, 2018, a Prehearing Order dated March 9, 2018, and a Hearing Cancellation/Reschedule Notice dated April 5, 2018 were mailed to

Ms. Murray at the address listed on her formal Complaint form. None of these documents was returned to the Commission as undeliverable by the post office. Therefore, the Complainant was deemed to have received these documents and had sufficient notice of the day, date and time of the scheduled hearing. Neither the Complainant nor a representative licensed to practice law in this Commonwealth appeared at the hearing on her behalf. To date, there is no further information about the Complainant regarding this hearing. Her failure to appear is unexcused.

Once notice of a hearing and the opportunity to be heard have been provided, it is the responsibility of the parties to appear and participate in the hearing. *Craig Sentner v. Bell Telephone Co. of Pennsylvania*, Docket No. F-00161106 (Opinion and Order entered October 25, 1993). The Complainant waived the opportunity to participate in the hearing by failing to appear. Ms. Murray's Complaint will be dismissed with prejudice. 52 Pa.Code § 5.245(a); *Martin W. Jefferson v. UGI Utilities, Inc.*, 1995 Pa. PUC LEXIS 159.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

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

2. As the Complainant, Tiara Murray had the burden of proof and failed to carry that burden. 66 Pa.C.S.A. § 332(a).

3. 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).

4. By failing to appear and be heard on this Complaint, Complainant waived the opportunity to participate in the hearing. 52 Pa.Code § 5.245(a); *Martin W. Jefferson v. UGI Utilities, Inc.*, 1995 Pa. PUC LEXIS 159.

5. Ms. Murray has failed to meet her burden of proving that she is entitled to the relief sought from the Commission.

ORDER

THEREFORE,

IT IS ORDERED:

1. That the Motion of Philadelphia Gas Works to dismiss the formal Complaint of Tiara Murray at Docket No. F-2017-2639882 is granted.
2. That the formal Complaint filed by Tiara Murray against Philadelphia Gas Works at Docket No. F-2017-2639882 is dismissed with prejudice for failure to prosecute.
3. That the Secretary's Bureau should mark this matter closed.

Date: July 3, 2018

_____/s/
Eranda Vero
Administrative Law Judge