

**BEFORE THE
PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION**

Latesha Bumpas	:	
	:	
v.	:	F-2018-3001754
	:	
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 Latesha Bumpas with prejudice because she failed to appear and prosecute the case.

HISTORY OF THE PROCEEDING

On May 9, 2018, Latesha Bumpas (Ms. Bumpas 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 make payments on her current payment arrangement. As relief, Ms. Bumpas requested that the Commission establish a more affordable 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 # 3597288.

On May 30, 2018, Respondent filed an Answer denying the material allegations of the Complaint.

A Hearing Notice dated May 31, 2018, notified the parties that an initial hearing was scheduled in this matter for Thursday, July 12, 2018, at 10:00 a.m.

At 8:40 a.m. on the morning of July 12, 2018, Ms. Bumpas contacted the Commission's Philadelphia office and informed me that she was unable to attend the scheduled hearing as her daughter was in the hospital. I informed the attorney for the Respondent, Graciela Christlieb, Esq., of this development and continued the hearing for a different day. Tr. 4-5.

A Hearing Notice dated July 18, 2018, notified the parties that the new hearing was scheduled to take place on Monday, September 10, 2018, at 10:00 a.m.

A Prehearing Order was issued on August 23, 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.

The hearing convened as scheduled on September 10, 2018. Graciela Christlieb, Esq., appeared representing PGW. Neither Complainant nor a counsel for the Complainant appeared at the hearing. The hearing convened at approximately 10:10 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 upon receipt of the hearing transcript on October 2, 2018.

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The Complainant is Latesha Bumpas, whose mailing address is 3235 North 15th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19140.
2. The Respondent is Philadelphia Gas Works.
3. On May 9, 2018, Ms. Bumpas filed a Complaint against PGW alleging that the utility is threatening to shut off her gas service and that she is unable to make payments on her current payment arrangement.
4. As relief, Ms. Bumpas requested that the Commission establish a more affordable payment arrangement on her behalf.
5. On May 30, 2018, the Respondent filed an Answer denying the material allegations of the Complaint.
6. A Hearing Notice dated May 31, 2018, notified the parties that an initial hearing was scheduled in this matter for Thursday, July 12, 2018, at 10:00 a.m.
7. On July 12, 2018, Ms. Bumpas requested and was granted a continuance of the scheduled hearing for good cause shown. Tr. 4-5.
8. A Hearing Notice dated July 18, 2018, notified the parties that the new hearing was scheduled to take place on Monday, September 10, 2018, at 10:00 a.m.
9. A Prehearing Order was issued on August 23, 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.

10. 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.

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

12. 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. Bumpas alleged that the utility is threatening to shut off her gas service and that she is unable to make payments on her current payment arrangement. As relief, Ms. Bumpas requested that the Commission establish a more affordable 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 July 18, 2018, and a Prehearing Order dated August 23, 2018, were mailed to Ms. Bumpas 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. Bumpas'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, Latesha Bumpas had the burden of proof. 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. Bumpas 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 Latesha Bumpas at Docket No. F-2018-3001754 is granted.
2. That the formal Complaint filed by Latesha Bumpas against Philadelphia Gas Works at Docket No. F-2018-3001754 is dismissed with prejudice for failure to prosecute.
3. That the Secretary's Bureau should mark this matter closed.

Date: October 10, 2018

_____/s/
Eranda Vero
Administrative Law Judge