

**BEFORE THE  
PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION**

Rasheed Dorn	:	
	:	
v.	:	C-2018-3004226
	:	
PECO Energy Company	:	

**INITIAL DECISION**

Before  
Angela T. Jones  
Administrative Law Judge

**INTRODUCTION**

The undersigned through this decision dismisses the formal Complaint (Complaint) filed in this matter for failure of the Complainant to appear at the hearing and prosecute the Complaint.

**HISTORY OF THE PROCEEDING**

On August 22, 2018, the Complainant, Rasheed Dorn, filed a Complaint with the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (Commission or PUC) against PECO Energy Company (PECO, Company or Respondent). The Complainant indicated that the utility threatened to terminate or had already terminated the Complainant's electric service and that he would like a payment agreement.

The Complainant alleged that he received high bills from October 2017, through February 2018. The Complainant contended that due to the high bills he was unable to comply with the terms of his payment arrangement. The Complainant stated that PECO recommended a

digital thermostat. The Complainant also stated that his landlord checked the entire heating system and did not find any problems. The Complainant further stated that he had an electrician inspect the heating system and the electrician did not find any issues with the system. The Complainant requested that the billing issue regarding his service account be resolved so that his account can be in good standing.

The Complaint was served on PECO electronically (eService) by the Commission's Secretary on August 22, 2018, according to the audit history of the docket. The eService is pursuant to the waiver of Section 702 program, under which the Respondent waives the service requirements in 66 Pa.C.S. § 702.

On September 10, 2018, Shawane Lee, Esquire, counsel for the Respondent, filed an Answer to the Complaint. The Answer denied all material facts of the Complaint. The Respondent averred it had performed a high bill investigation at the Complainant's service address. The Respondent determined from its investigation that the meter was accurately reading the electric usage and that Complainant was billed properly for his usage.

The Respondent averred that the Complainant filed an informal complaint with the Commission's Bureau of Consumer Services (BCS) at Case No. 3636487, which requested a payment arrangement. The informal complaint was dismissed by BCS Decision dated August 7, 2018, because the Commission is prohibited by statute from providing a payment arrangement to a customer that has customer assistance program (CAP) arrears.

The Respondent averred that the Complainant has a mixed arrearage with a CAP balance and a non-CAP balance. The Respondent contended that this Complaint should be dismissed because the Complainant is not entitled to a payment arrangement on his CAP arrears as the Commission is prohibited by statute from granting a payment arrangement. Although the Commission has discretion to grant a payment arrangement on the Complainant's non-CAP balance, the Respondent contended that the Complainant has a poor payment history and therefore, consistent with precedent, should not be granted a payment arrangement on his non-CAP balance.

The Respondent requested that the Commission dismiss the Complaint.

A Corrected Hearing Notice dated September 28, 2018,<sup>1</sup> notified the parties that an initial in-person hearing was scheduled for Wednesday, November 7, 2018, at 10:00 a.m. This Notice indicated that the case was assigned to the undersigned Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) as the presiding officer.

A Prehearing Order dated September 12, 2018, provided procedural rules and guidelines for the proceeding and emphasized the following:

- (1) a request to change the scheduled hearing should be sent at least five days prior to the hearing date;
- (2) the request for a hearing change is to be in writing and sent to all parties of record; and
- (3) a caution that Complainant may lose the case if he does not take part in the hearing and present evidence on the issues raised.

The evidentiary hearing convened as scheduled on November 7, 2018. The Complainant was not present and did not communicate a reasonable excuse as to why he was unable to appear. Shawane L. Lee, Esquire, was present with one potential witness. Consistent with the practice of the undersigned, the hearing recessed for approximately 15 minutes to provide the Complainant time to communicate a reasonable excuse as to why he would be late or would not be able to appear. The hearing reconvened at approximately 10:20 a.m. and the Complainant was still absent. Attorney Lee moved to dismiss the Complaint with prejudice for failure to prosecute. I stated that I would rule on the motion in writing and adjourned.

The transcript of this Complaint consists of eight pages of transcribed testimony. The record closed on December 3, 2018, when the undersigned received the transcript.

To date, there has been no further communication from the Complainant. This matter is ripe for decision.

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<sup>1</sup> A Hearing Notice dated September 12, 2018, scheduled this proceeding for October 9, 2018. Due to a conflict in scheduling, this proceeding was rescheduled.

## FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The Complainant is Rasheed Dorn.
2. The Respondent is PECO Energy Company, a jurisdictional public utility that provides electric distribution service in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.
3. On August 22, 2018, the Complainant filed a Complaint with the Commission against the Respondent.
4. The Respondent filed its Answer on September 10, 2018, which denied any wrongdoing.
5. A Corrected Hearing Notice, dated September 28, 2018, was sent by regular first-class mail to the Complainant and scheduled an initial hearing for Wednesday, November 7, 2018, at 10:00 a.m.
6. A Prehearing Order, dated September 12, 2018, provided the Complainant with the proper procedure to participate in the initial hearing and to obtain a continuance to reschedule the hearing date.
7. None of the documents mailed to the Complainant were returned to the Commission by the United States post office as undeliverable.
8. Neither the Complainant nor any counsel representing the Complainant appeared at the scheduled hearing on November 7, 2018.
9. The Complainant did not settle or withdraw the Complaint.

## DISCUSSION

In this Complaint, the Complainant indicated that the Respondent threatened to terminate his electric service and requested a payment arrangement. The issues in this proceeding are determined by whether the Complainant sustained his burden of proof. By failing to participate in the hearing, the Complainant was unable to meet this burden.

The party seeking affirmative relief from the Commission bears the burden of proof. 66 Pa.C.S. § 332(a). As a matter of law, a complainant must show that the named utility is responsible or accountable for the problem described in the Complaint to prevail. *Patterson v. Bell Tel. Co. of Pa.*, 72 Pa. PUC 196 (1990); *Feinstein v. Phila. Suburban Water Co.*, 50 Pa. PUC 300 (1976). This responsibility or accountability to the named utility must be shown by a preponderance of the evidence. *Samuel J. Lansberry, Inc. v. Pa. Pub. Util. Comm'n*, 578 A.2d 600 (Pa.Cmwlth. 1990), *alloc. denied*, 602 A.2d 863 (Pa. 1992). A preponderance of the evidence is that which is more convincing, by even the smallest amount, than that presented by the other party. *Se-Ling Hosiery v. Margulies*, 70 A.2d 854 (Pa. 1950).

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).

The Commission sent a Corrected Hearing Notice dated September 28, 2018, to the Complainant by regular first-class mail to the address listed on the Complaint. This document was never returned to the sender, the scheduling staff of the Office of Administrative Law Judge (OALJ) in Harrisburg.

The undersigned issued a Prehearing Order dated September 12, 2018, which *inter alia*, instructed the parties that any request to change the scheduled hearing date should state the agreement or opposition of the other party and be submitted in writing no later than five days prior to the hearing. The Prehearing Order, which was mailed to the Complainant at the address shown in the Complaint, was never returned by the U.S. post office as undeliverable. Accordingly, it is presumed that this mailing, which was done through the ordinary course of business, was received by the Complainant. *Berkowitz v. Mayflower Securities, Inc.*, 317 A.2d 584 (Pa. 1974); *Meirerdierck v. Miller*, 147 A.2d 406 (Pa. 1959); *Samaras v. Hartwick*, 698 A.2d 71 (Pa.Super. 1997); *Judge v. Celina Mutual Insurance Co.*, 449 A.2d 658 (Pa.Super. 1982).

The Complainant is deemed to have received these documents and had sufficient notice of the day, date and time of the scheduled hearing. The Complainant was notified of the scheduled hearing date and time, as well as how to contact the OALJ. The Complainant made no attempt whatsoever to notify the presiding officer that he did not plan to participate in the scheduled November 7, 2018, hearing.

Under these circumstances, the Complainant had ample opportunity to appear and be heard in this proceeding but chose not to do so. Once notice of a hearing and the opportunity to be heard has been provided to the parties, it is the responsibility of both parties to appear and participate in the hearing. The due process rights of the Complainant have been fully protected. *Sentner v. Bell Tel. Co. of Pa.*, Docket No. F-00161106 (Opinion and Order entered October 25, 1993); 52 Pa.Code § 5.245(a).

Section 332(a) of the Public Utility Code (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 he is entitled to relief. By choosing not to appear and proffer any evidence to support the Complaint, the Complainant has failed to meet this burden.

As the Commission stated in *Mumma v. PPL Electric Utilities Corp.*, Docket No. C-00014869, p. 3 (Opinion and Order entered January 28, 2002), “It is well-established law that

once timely notice of a hearing and the opportunity to be heard have been provided, it is the responsibility of the parties to be present and participate in the hearing.” See, *Schneider v. Pa. Pub. Util. Comm’n*, 479 A.2d 10 (Pa.Cmwlth. 1984); *Plummer v. Columbia Gas of Pa., Inc.*, Docket No. Z-00847836 (Opinion and Order entered September 27, 2001). The Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court has made it clear that in administrative hearings, “a party’s own negligence is not sufficient good cause as a matter of law for failing to appear at a ... hearing.” *Eat ’N Park Hospitality Group, Inc. v. Unemployment Compensation Board of Review*, 970 A.2d 492, 494 (Pa.Cmwlth. 2008).

The Respondent’s counsel moved that the Complaint be dismissed with prejudice for failure to prosecute. As stated above, the due process rights of the Complainant have been protected. The Complainant had notice of the scheduled hearing and failed to appear to prosecute his Complaint. The failure of the Complainant to appear at this scheduled hearing is unexcused. By his failure to attend the hearing and present evidence on the issues raised, the Complainant failed to sustain his burden of proof.

Due to the waste of the Commission’s and Respondent’s time, money and energy occasioned by the Complainant’s failure to appear at a hearing of which he had notice, this Complaint will be dismissed with prejudice in accordance with well-established Commission precedent. *Jefferson v. UGI Utilities, Inc.*, Docket No. Z-00269892 (Opinion and Order entered December 26, 1995); *Evans v. Bell Atlantic-Pennsylvania, Inc.*, Docket No. C-00957229 (Opinion and Order entered July 12, 1996); *King v. PECO Energy Co.*, Docket No. C-00967919 (Opinion and Order entered January 16, 1997); *Kenny v. PPL Electric Utilities Corp.*, Docket No. C-20042399 (Final Order entered October 13, 2004); *Jones v. The Peoples Natural Gas Co.*, Docket No. C-20054885 (Opinion and Order entered February 14, 2006); *El-Ayazra v. West Penn Power Co.*, Docket No. F-2015-2509292 (Opinion and Order entered June 30, 2016); *Hack v. Pa. American Water Co.*, Docket No. F-2017-2618548 (Opinion and Order entered August 23, 2018); *Whaumbush v. PECO Energy Co.*, Docket No. C-2017-262269 (Opinion and Order entered August 23, 2018).

The Complainant waived the opportunity to participate in the hearing by failing to appear. This case will be dismissed. 52 Pa.Code § 5.245(a); *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. § 701.

2. Notice properly mailed to a party's last known address and not returned by the post office is presumed to have been received. *Berkowitz v. Mayflower Securities, Inc.*, 317 A.2d 584 (Pa. 1974); *Meirerdierck v. Miller*, 147 A.2d 406 (Pa. 1959); *Samaras v. Hartwick*, 698 A.2d 71 (Pa.Super. 1997); *Judge v. Celina Mutual Insurance Co.*, 449 A.2d 658 (Pa.Super. 1982).

3. By Corrected Hearing Notice dated September 28, 2018, the Complainant had notice of the day, date and time of the scheduled hearing. 52 Pa.Code § 5.201(a).

4. Once notice of a hearing and the opportunity to be heard has been provided, it is the responsibility of the parties to appear and participate in the hearing. *Sentner v. Bell Telephone Co. of Pennsylvania*, Docket No. F-00161106 (Order entered October 25, 1993).

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

6. The due process rights of the Complainant have been fully protected because the Complainant was afforded notice and the opportunity to appear and be heard. *Schneider v. Pa. Pub. Util. Comm'n*, 479 A.2d 10 (Pa.Cmwlth. 1984).

7. A formal complaint may be dismissed if, after notice and an opportunity to be heard, a Complainant fails to appear and prosecute the Complaint. *Mumma v. PPL Electric Utilities Corp.*, Docket No. C-00014869 (Opinion and Order entered January 28, 2002).

8. The Complainant, Rasheed Dorn, failed to sustain his burden of proof.  
66 Pa.C.S. § 332(a).

ORDER

THEREFORE,

IT IS ORDERED:

1. That the motion by Shawane L. Lee, Esquire, on behalf of PECO Energy Company to dismiss the formal Complaint of Rasheed Dorn at Docket No. C-2018-3004226 for lack of prosecution is granted.

2. That the formal Complaint filed by Rasheed Dorn against PECO Energy Company at Docket No. C-2018-3004226, is dismissed in its entirety with prejudice.

3. That the Secretary's Bureau mark Docket No. C-2018-3004226 closed.

Dated: January 15, 2019

\_\_\_\_\_/s/  
Angela T. Jones  
Administrative Law Judge