

June 16, 2020

Via Electronic Filing

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

**Re: Docket No. C-2020-3019952
Martha Dennis v. West Penn Power Company
Preliminary Objections**

Dear Secretary Chiavetta:

Attached for filing is the Preliminary Objections of West Penn Power Company to the Complaint filed by Martha Dennis in the above captioned proceedings.

A copy of the Preliminary Objections has been provided to Connie Foster in the manner indicated on the attached Certificate of Service.

If there are any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Very truly yours,

Reger Rizzo & Darnall LLP

Margaret A. Morris

Margaret A. Morris

MAM/co
Enclosures

cc: Teresa K. Harrold, Esquire, FirstEnergy Service Company [w/encls]
Martha Dennis [w/encls.]

**Re: Docket No. C-2020-3019952
Martha Dennis v. West Penn Power Company
Preliminary Objections**

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that a true and correct copy of the foregoing document has been served upon the following person(s), in the manner indicated, in accordance with the requirements of 52 Pa. Code § 1.54 (relating to service by a participant).

Via Electronic Mail

Martha Dennis
samandmartha@icloud.com

Dated: June 16, 2020

Margaret A. Morris
Margaret A. Morris, Esquire

**BEFORE THE
PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION**

| | | |
|--------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| MARTHA DENNIS | : | |
| | : | |
| v. | : | Docket No. C-2020-3019952 |
| | : | |
| WEST PENN POWER COMPANY | : | |

NOTICE TO PLEAD

Pursuant to 52 Pa. Code § 5.63, you are hereby notified that if you do not file a written response answering 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 true, whereby requiring no other proof. All pleadings, such as a Reply to Preliminary Objections, must be filed with the Secretary of the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission, with a copy served to counsel for West Penn Power Company, Margaret A. Morris, Esq., and where applicable, the Administrative Law Judge presiding over the issue.

File with:

Rosemary Chiavetta, Esquire
Secretary
Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission
rchiavetta@pa.gov

With a copy to:

Margaret A. Morris, Esquire
Reger Rizzo & Darnall LLP
mmorris@regerlaw.com

Date: June 16, 2020

Margaret A. Morris

Margaret A. Morris, Esquire
Attorney ID No. 75048
Reger Rizzo & Darnall LLP
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Philadelphia, PA 19104
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Counsel for West Penn Power Company

BEFORE THE
PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION

| | | |
|-------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| MARTHA DENNIS | : | |
| | : | |
| v. | : | Docket No. C-2020-3019952 |
| | : | |
| WEST PENN POWER COMPANY | : | |

**PRELIMINARY OBJECTIONS TO THE
FORMAL COMPLAINT OF MARTHA DENNIS**

West Penn Power Company (West Penn or Company), by and through its attorneys, Reger Rizzo & Darnall LLP, pursuant to 52 Pa. Code § 5.101, hereby files its Preliminary Objections to the Formal Complaint of Martha Dennis (Complainant) filed in the above-captioned proceeding.

West Penn avers the subject of the Formal Complaint is beyond the jurisdiction of the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (Commission) who is without authorization to grant the Complainant’s request for damages. The Formal Complaint includes impertinent matter in its requested relief. Therefore, West Penn requests that this Preliminary Objection be granted and that the Commission: (1) grant its Preliminary Objections and strike the Complainant’s requests for monetary damages; (2) expressly prohibit the Complainant from introducing any testimony or exhibits at any evidentiary hearing regarding alleged damages; and (3) grant the Company such other relief as may be just and reasonable under the circumstances.

In support of its preliminary objections, West Penn states as follows:

I. Procedural Background

1. West Penn is an electric distribution company certificated as a public utility permitted to operate within the Commonwealth in Pennsylvania and provides residential electric service to the Complainant under Account No. 100107782557.

2. The Complainant resides at 12237 Blue Mountain Avenue, Waynesboro, Pennsylvania (Service Location) and filed a Formal Complaint alleging a “power surge” caused damage to personal property. She seeks compensatory damages for the alleged loss in the amount of \$2,000. Compl. at ¶ 5.

3. In its Answer and New Matter being served contemporaneously with this Preliminary Objection, West Penn denied that its actions were negligent or that the Company is responsible for the alleged damage to personal property.

4. Pursuant to 52 Pa. Code § 5.101, West Penn objects to the requested relief on the grounds that the Commission lacks jurisdiction to award monetary damages. The Complainant seeks to have West Penn pay for the alleged damages to her property.

II. Argument

5. 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) 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.

6. 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).

7. In the instant Formal Complaint, the Complainant requests to be reimbursed for the damaged personal property.

8. Clearly, that requested relief sought through the Formal Complaint is an award of monetary damages from the Company.

A. Impertinent Matter

9. The Commission's procedural regulations allow a party to object to pleadings that fail to comply with the rules of administrative practice or that include scandalous or impertinent matters. *See* 52 Pa. Code § 5.102(a)(2).

10. It is well-established under Pennsylvania law that the enforcement powers of the Commission do not include the power to award money damages. *Elkin v. Bell Tel. Co. of PA.*, 420 A.2d 371 (Pa. 1980); *Feingold v. Bell of Pa.*, 383 A.2d 791 (Pa. 1978); *see Nagy v. Bell Tel. Co. of PA.*, 436 A.2d 701 (Pa. Super. 1981).

11. In *Feingold*, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court explained:

. . . the statutory array of PUC remedial and enforcement powers does not include the power to award damages to a private litigant for breach of contract by a public utility. Nor can we find an express grant of power from which the power to award such damages can be fairly implied. Thus, it can be concluded that the Legislature did not intend for the PUC to have such a power.

Feingold, 383 A.2d at 794.

12. The Court of Common Pleas retains original jurisdiction over suits for monetary damages. *Behrend, supra*.

13. A prayer for damages, which are not legally recoverable in the cause of action, is “impertinent matter” in the sense that it is irrelevant to that cause of action and is correctly challenged through a motion to strike the requested relief as impertinent matter. *Third Avenue Realty Limited Partners v. Pennsylvania-American Water Co.*, Docket No. C-2010-2167286 (Final Order entered September 30, 2010) (citing *Hudock v. Donegal Mut. Ins. Co.*, 264 A.2d 668 (Pa. 1970)).

14. The Complainant’s requested relief of damages is irrelevant to the instant cause of action and therefore an “impertinent matter.”

15. Therefore, in accordance with Pennsylvania law, this Commission does not have the power to award monetary damages and the Complainant’s request for money damages is an impertinent matter that must be stricken within the use and meaning of Commission regulation at 52 Pa. Code § 5.101(a)(2).

WHEREFORE, Respondent, West Penn Power Company, requests that the requested damages set forth in the Formal Complaint filed by Martha Dennis be stricken in its entirety for lack of subject matter jurisdiction.

Respectfully submitted,

Date: June 16, 2020

Margaret A. Morris

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