

**BEFORE THE
PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION**

Maria Gonzalez	:	
	:	
v.	:	F-2020-3023515
	:	
Philadelphia Gas Works	:	

INITIAL DECISION

Before
Marta Guhl
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 28, 2020, Maria Gonzalez (Complainant) filed a formal Complaint with the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (Commission) against Philadelphia Gas Works (PGW, Company or Respondent). On the Complaint form, the Complainant alleged that she was being charged for gas usage that she was not responsible for and she requested a further investigation into the matter.

The formal Complaint is an appeal of a decision of the Bureau of Consumer Services (BCS) at BCS Case No. 3772243 dated November 12, 2020, which dismissed the Complainant's informal complaint.

PGW filed an Answer on January 25, 2021. PGW denied all material allegations of fact in the Complaint.

On January 28, 2021, a Telephonic Hearing Notice was issued to all parties, setting an Initial Call-In Telephonic Hearing for Thursday, March 11, 2021 at 10:00 a.m. and the matter was assigned to me. The Notice indicated in italicized and underlined text: “*Attention:* *You may lose the case if you do not take part in this hearing and present facts on the issues raised.*” The Notice was mailed to the Complainant at the address on the formal Complaint and was not returned by the U.S. Postal Service as being undeliverable. The Commission issued an Order on March 20, 2020, which provides that service by the Commission on parties will be exclusively electronic during the pendency of the Proclamation of Disaster Emergency. *See, Emergency Order re Suspension of Regulatory and Statutory Deadlines, Modification to Filing and Service Requirements*, M-2020-3019262, at 4 (March 20, 2020). However, in this matter, the Complainant did not have an email address so service was made via mail.

A Prehearing Order was issued and served to all parties on February 1, 2021, again informing the parties of the date, time and procedure to call in for the hearing and providing procedural information. The Prehearing Order was mailed to the Complainant at the address on the formal Complaint and was not returned by the U.S. Postal Service as being undeliverable. The Prehearing Order on page 4, advised that:

**THIS COMPLAINT MAY BE DISMISSED IF THE
COMPLAINANT FAILS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE
HEARING AND PRESENT EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT OF
THE COMPLAINT.**

(emphasis in the original).

The hearing began on March 11, 2021, at 10:22 a.m. Graciela Christlieb, Esquire, was present on behalf of PGW. The Complainant did not participate. The Complainant had not

called or otherwise contacted the Commission to request a continuance or to explain her absence.¹ Attorney Christlieb moved that the matter be dismissed for failure to prosecute.

The record closed on March 15, 2021, upon receipt of the transcript. PGW's Motion to Dismiss for Failure to Prosecute is ready for a decision.

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The Complainant is Maria Gonzalez, who resides at 2447 North Fairhill Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19133.

2. Philadelphia Gas Works is the Respondent.

3. On December 28, 2020, the Complainant filed this formal Complaint.

4. The Respondent filed an Answer on January 25, 2021.

5. On January 28, 2021, a Telephonic Hearing Notice was issued to all parties, setting an Initial In-Person Hearing for Thursday, March 11, 2021, beginning at 10:00 a.m.

6. The Hearing Notice was mailed to the Complainant at the address provided in the Complaint.

7. A Prehearing Order was issued to all parties on February 1, 2021, again informing the Complainant of the date, time and procedure to call-in for the hearing and providing procedural information.

¹ While Commission offices are closed due to the pandemic, Commission staff has been going to the offices on a regular basis to check the mail. There has been no mail received in the office from the Complainant since the date of the hearing to explain her failure to participate.

8. The Prehearing Order was mailed to the Complainant at the address provided by the Complainant in the Complaint.

9. In bold print, the Prehearing Order advised on page 4 that:

**THIS COMPLAINT MAY BE DISMISSED IF THE
COMPLAINANT FAILS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE
HEARING AND PRESENT EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT OF
THE COMPLAINT.**

10. On the day of the hearing, PGW was present and represented by counsel.

11. The Complainant was not present when the hearing began at 10:22 a.m.

12. The Complainant has not contacted the Commission about the hearing.

13. None of the documents mailed to the Complainant were returned as undeliverable.

14. The Complainant did not request a continuance or provide a statement of "good cause" for her absence on 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.Cmwlt. 1984). The essential elements of due process in an administrative proceeding are notice and an opportunity to be heard. *J.P. v. Dep't of Human Servs.*, 150 A.3d 173 (Pa.Cmwlt. 2016). 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.Cmwlt. 1994).

A Hearing Notice and a Prehearing Order were mailed to the Complainant. The Prehearing Order and the Hearing Notice contained information regarding the date, time and location of the hearing. These documents were mailed to the address provided by the Complainant in her Complaint and none of these documents was returned by the U.S. Postal Service to the Commission as undeliverable. It is therefore deemed that the Complainant received these documents and had notice of the date and time of the scheduled hearing. *Berkowitz v. Mayflower Securities, Inc.*, 455 Pa. 531, 317 A.2d 584 (1974).

As the Commission noted in *Strydio v. PPL Electric Utilities Corporation*, 2018 Pa. PUC LEXIS 258, *8, Docket No. C-2017-263304, p. 6 (Opinion and Order entered July 18, 2018) "[o]nce notice of a hearing and the opportunity to be heard have been provided by the Commission, it is the responsibility of the parties to appear and participate in the hearing," citing, *Mumma v. PPL Electric Utilities Corporation*, Docket No. C-00014869 (Order entered January 24, 2002); *Sentner v. Bell Tel. Co. of PA*, Docket No. F-00161106 (Order entered October 25, 1993). The Complainant was notified of the scheduled hearing and did not appear. To date, the Complainant has not contacted the Commission or the undersigned regarding this hearing. The Complainant has waived the opportunity to participate in the hearing by failing to appear. 52 Pa.Code § 5.245(a); *Jefferson v. UGI Utilities, Inc.*, 1995 Pa. PUC LEXIS 159 (Opinion and Order entered December 26, 1995).

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. The Complaint will be dismissed. *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. The Complainant received notice of the hearing. *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. *J.P. v. Dep't of Human Servs.*, 150 A.3d 173 (Pa.Cmwlth. 2016); *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. The Complainant did not participate in the hearing, failed to appear for the hearing and did not present any evidence and, therefore, she failed to meet her 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 Maria Gonzalez at Docket No. F-2020-3023515 is granted.

