*Via electronic service only due to Emergency Order at M-2020-3019262*

**BEFORE THE**

**PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION**

Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission, et al. : R-2021-3024296

:

:

v. :

:

Columbia Gas of Pennsylvania, Inc. :

**THIRD INTERIM ORDER**

**ADDRESSING COMPLAINANT RICHARD C. CULBERTSON’S THIRD MOTION**

**TO COMPEL DISCOVERY**

HISTORY OF THE PROCEEDING

On March 30, 2021, Columbia Gas of Pennsylvania, Inc. (Columbia) filed with the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (Commission) Supplement No. 325 to its Tariff Gas – Pa. P.U.C. No. 9. Supplement No. 325 was issued to be effective for service rendered on or after May 29, 2021. It proposed changes to Columbia’s distribution base rates designed to produce an increase in annual revenues of approximately $98.3 million based upon data for a fully projected future test year (FPFTY) ending December 31, 2022.

On May 6, 2021, the Commission issued an Order suspending Columbia’s Supplement No. 325 by operation of law until December 29, 2021.

On June 21, 2021, Complainant Richard C. Culbertson served Set IV, Questions 1-31, on Columbia. On June 28, 2021, Columbia served objections to all of Mr. Culbertson’s Set IV interrogatories. On July 6, 2021, Mr. Culbertson filed a Motion to Compel Columbia’s response to his Set IV interrogatories. On July 9, 2021, Columbia filed its answer to this motion to compel.

In accordance with the Prehearing Order issued by the undersigned on May 21, 2021, motions to compel are due within three days of service of written objections. Thus, any motion to compel the Set IV responses was due on July 1, 2021.

DISCUSSION

Section 5.321(c) of the Commission’s Rules of Administrative Practice and Procedure, 52 Pa.Code § 5.321(c), specifically provides that “a party may obtain discovery regarding any matter, not privileged, which is relevant to the subject matter involved in the pending action.” Discovery is permitted regardless of whether the information sought “relates to the claim or defense of the party seeking discovery or to the claim or defense of another party or participant.” *Id*. Information may be discoverable, even if it would be inadmissible at a hearing. “It is not ground for objection that the information sought will be inadmissible at hearing if the information sought appears reasonably calculated to lead to the discovery of admissible evidence.” *Id*. Consistently, the Commission has allowed participants wide latitude in discovery matters. *Pa. P.U.C. v. The Peoples Natural Gas Company*, 62 Pa. PUC 56 (August 26, 1986); and *Pa. P.U.C. v. Equitable Gas Company*, 61 Pa. PUC 468 (May 16, 1986).

The Commission’s regulations place limitations on the scope of discovery. Discovery that would cause unreasonable burden or expense or require an unreasonable investigation by a party is not permitted. 52 Pa.Code § 5.361(a)(2), (4). “The law is [ ] clear that the Commission has the right to limit discovery that would place an unreasonable burden upon a participant in litigation*.*” *Application of Newtown Artesian Water Company and Indian Rock Water Company*, Docket No. A-212070, 1990 Pa. PUC LEXIS 83 (June 20, 1990) *citing* *City of Pittsburgh v. Pa. PUC*, 526 A.2d 1243, 1249-50 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1987); Answer of Columbia to Motion to Compel, p. 2.

The discovery regulations were modified by a Prehearing Order issued in this proceeding on May 21, 2021. Those modifications were agreed upon by the parties participating in the prehearing conference. They are designed to lessen the discovery regulation time limits in an effort to afford the parties with timely discovery in advance of the preparation of written testimony and exhibits. These discovery modifications are necessary because there is a statutory deadline for this proceeding and hearings were scheduled for August 3-5, 2021, at the prehearing conference. It would be prejudicial to Columbia to entertain an untimely motion to compel while it responds to discovery from several parties, propounds discovery and prepares written testimony and exhibits. The discovery rules modifications must be applied equally and fairly to all parties in this proceeding.

Columbia’s objection is sustained and Mr. Culbertson’s motion to compel answers to Richard C. Culbertson Set IV., Questions 1- 31, is denied because it is untimely.

THEREFORE,

IT IS ORDERED:

1. That the Motion to Compel filed by Richard C. Culbertson on July 6, 2021, is denied in its entirety because it was untimely filed.

Date: July 20, 2021 /s/

Mark A. Hoyer

Deputy Chief Administrative Law Judge

**R-2021-3024296 - PA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION v. COLUMBIA GAS OF PENNSYLVANIA INC**7/14/21

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