

**PENNSYLVANIA
PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION
Harrisburg, PA 17120**

Public Meeting held December 21, 2023

Commissioners Present:

Stephen M. DeFrank, Chairman
Kimberly Barrow, Vice Chair
Ralph V. Yanora, Dissenting
Kathryn L. Zerfuss
John F. Coleman, Jr., Dissenting

Atia Zaidi

F-2022-3036945

v.

PECO Energy Company

OPINION AND ORDER

BY THE COMMISSION:

This matter comes before the Public Utility Commission (Commission) on *sua sponte* reconsideration. On July 20, 2023, Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) Marta Guhl issued an Initial Decision (I.D.) in the above-captioned proceeding. No exceptions were filed to the Initial Decision. On August 23, 2023, the Commission issued a Final Order in accordance with Section 332(h) of the Code, 66 Pa. C.S. § 332(h). However, we have exercised our right to *sua sponte* rescind the Final Order pursuant to Section 703(g) of the Public Utility Code (Code), 66 Pa. C.S. § 703(g).

I. History of the Proceeding

On November 18, 2022, Atia Zaidi (Ms. Zaidi or Complainant) filed a Formal Complaint (Complaint) with the Commission against PECO Energy Company (PECO or Company).¹ In the Formal Complaint form, Ms. Zaidi indicated that PECO had shut off her service and requested a payment arrangement. Complaint at 2.

On December 13, 2022, PECO filed an Answer and New Matter denying the material allegations of the Complaint. Additionally, on the same day, PECO filed Preliminary Objections alleging the Commission lacks jurisdiction in this matter because the Complainant is no longer a customer. Preliminary Objections at 5.

On January 20, 2023, the Preliminary Objections were assigned to Deputy Chief Administrative Law Judge (DCALJ) Christopher Pell as a Motion Judge. On February 10, 2023, DCALJ Pell issued an Interim Order which dismissed the Preliminary Objections and ordered the proceeding to be scheduled for a hearing. Interim Order at 6.

On February 10, 2023, the Commission issued an Initial Call-In Telephonic Hearing Notice (Hearing Notice) which scheduled the hearing on March 30, 2023, and assigned ALJ Marta Guhl. The Hearing Notice advised the parties of the date and time of the hearing and included the following warning to the Parties regarding the failure to appear:

FAILURE TO APPEAR: You may lose the case if you do not take part in this hearing and present evidence on the issue(s) raised. Your case may be dismissed “with prejudice” which means that you will be barred from filing another

¹ This is a timely appeal from the Bureau of Consumer Services (BCS) determination at BCS No. 3874982 issued on November 2, 2022. An appeal of a BCS informal complaint decision is a *de novo* review conducted by either an ALJ or a special agent. 52 Pa. Code § 56.173(a).

complaint raising the same claim(s) and issue(s) presented in the dismissed complaint.

Hearing Notice at 2.

On February 21, 2023, ALJ Guhl issued a Prehearing Order which included, *inter alia*, the same cautionary language concerning failure to appear along with various procedural requirements and instructions on how to request a continuance.

The hearing convened as scheduled on March 30, 2023. Counsel for PECO was present however, the Complainant failed to call into the hearing. Counsel for PECO moved that the Complaint be dismissed with prejudice for lack of prosecution. Tr. at 4.

The record closed on April 25, 2023.

On July 20, 2023, ALJ Guhl issued an Initial Decision granting PECO's Motion to Dismiss Ms. Zaidi's Complaint.

On August 23, 2023, in accordance with 66 Pa. C.S. § 332(h), the Initial Decision became final without further Commission action. The Final Order, *inter alia*, dismissed the Complaint with prejudice and marked the proceeding closed.

II. Discussion

A. Legal Standards

1. Commission's Power to Amend or Rescind Orders

By the terms of Section 703(g) of the Code, the Commission has the power to amend or rescind its own orders at any time, subject only to the requirements of due process. Section 703(g) of the Code states:

The commission may, at any time, after notice and after opportunity to be heard as provided in this chapter, rescind or amend any order made by it. Any order rescinding or amending a prior order shall, when served upon the person, corporation, or municipal corporation affected, and after notice thereof is given to the other parties to the proceedings, have the same effect as is herein provided for original orders.

66 Pa. C.S. § 703(g); *see also*, *Department of Highways v. Pa. PUC*, 185 Pa. Super. 418, 138 A.2d 143 (1958). In exercising Commission authority to amend or rescind an order pursuant to Section 703(g) of the Code, the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania has stated: “Because such relief may result in disturbance of final orders, it must be granted judiciously and only under appropriate circumstances.” *See, City of Pittsburgh v. Pennsylvania Department of Transportation*, 490 Pa. 264, 416 A.2d 461 (1980); *see also*, *West Penn Power Co. v. Pa. PUC*, 659 A.2d 1055, 1056 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1995) (*West Penn Power*); *see also*, *Feleccia v. PPL Electric Utilities Corp.*, Docket No. C-20016210 (Order entered March 7, 2003) (*Feleccia*).

Requests for such relief must be consistent with Section 5.572(d) of our regulations, 52 Pa. Code § 5.572 (d), relating to petitions for relief following the issuance

of a final decision. Under Section 5.572(d), a party may seek relief from a final Commission order at any time by petition for rescission or amendment.

The standards for granting rescission, amended and/or reconsideration have been established under the holding of *Duick v. Pennsylvania Gas and Water Company*, 56 Pa. P.U.C. 553 (Order entered December 17, 1982) (*Duick*). The standards for granting reconsideration, involving rescission and amendment of a prior Commission Order, include the raising of “new and novel arguments” not previously heard or considerations which appear to have been overlooked or not addressed by the Commission. *Duick*.

2. Due Process

As an administrative agency of the Commonwealth, the Commission is required to provide due process to the parties appearing before it. *Schneider v. Pa. PUC*, 479 A.2d 10, 15 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1984) (*Schneider*), citing, *Fusaro v. Pa. PUC*, 382 A.2d 794 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1978). Due process is satisfied when the parties are afforded notice and the opportunity to appear and be heard. *Schneider* 479 A.2d at 15.

B. ALJ’s Initial Decision

ALJ Guhl made thirteen (13) Findings of Fact and reached eight (8) Conclusions of Law. I.D. at 3-4; 6-7. The Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law are incorporated herein by reference and are adopted without comment unless they are either expressly or by necessary implication rejected or modified by the Opinion and Order.

In the Initial Decision, ALJ Guhl noted that the Commission served the Hearing Notice on the Complainant electronically, via eService, on February 10, 2023 regarding the March 30, 2023, hearing. I.D. at 4. The ALJ explained that the Notice

informed the Parties of the date and time for the hearing and provided instructions on how to call in to the hearing. *Id.*

The ALJ also pointed out that her Prehearing Order dated February 21, 2023 was also served electronically on the Complainant and that neither the Hearing Notice nor the Prehearing Order were returned as undeliverable. I.D. at 4-5. ALJ Guhl acknowledged that documents sent in the ordinary course of business were presumed to be received by the Complainant. *Id.* (citing, *Hu v. PECO Energy Co.*, Docket No. C-2019-3012075 (Order entered Dec. 19, 2019); *Zirkel v. Phila. Gas Works*, Docket No. C-2016-2561176 (Final Order entered April 7, 2017); *Morella v. PECO Energy Co.*, Docket No. C-2016-2553416 (Final Order entered January 31, 2017)).

ALJ Guhl determined that the Complainant's absence was not unavoidable and therefore, she waived the opportunity to participate in the hearing by failing to appear. I.D. at 5. Furthermore, the ALJ reasoned, by failing to appear, the Complainant did not meet her burden of proof. *Id.* at 5-6.

ALJ Guhl concluded that because the Complainant failed to appear without good cause it was appropriate to grant PECO's Motion to Dismiss the Complaint with prejudice. I.D. at 6. The ALJ dismissed the Complaint with prejudice in accordance with *Elliott v. Pa. Elec. Co.*, F-618-3003502 (Opinion and Order entered February 6, 2020). *Id.*

C. Final Order

As noted above, on August 23, 2023, the Commission entered a Final Order stating that, in accordance with the provisions of Section 332(h) of the Code, 66 Pa. C.S. § 332(h), the Initial Decision of ALJ Guhl issued July 20, 2023, "has become final

without further Commission action.” The Final Order, *inter alia*, dismissed the Complaint with prejudice and marked the proceeding closed.

III. Disposition

It has come to the attention of the Commission that there may have been an issue with providing notice to the Parties in this proceeding. As stated, *supra*, due process is satisfied when the parties are afforded notice and the opportunity to appear and be heard. Therefore, out of an abundance of caution and to ensure due process we will rescind the *August 2023 Final Order* issued in this proceeding and provide the Parties with an opportunity for additional proceedings to ensure that this potential notice issue is resolved by fully affording the Parties their due process rights, specifically providing notice and the opportunity to appear and be heard, with respect to this matter, consistent with this Opinion and Order. Accordingly, we will re-serve a copy of the Initial Decision issued in this proceeding on all Parties of record and afford them an opportunity to file Exceptions and Replies to Exceptions in accordance with the Secretarial Letter accompanying the Initial Decision. If Exceptions are timely filed, we will consider the Exceptions and any responses thereto. However, if no Exceptions are timely filed, then the matter may be handled in accordance with applicable law pursuant to Section 332(h) of the Public Utility Code including that the matter may become final by operation of law.

IV. Conclusion

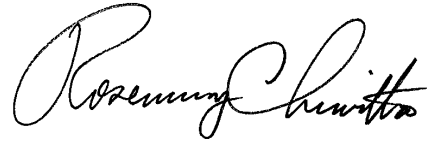
Based on the foregoing discussion, we will rescind the *August 2023 Final Order* issued in this proceeding and re-serve a copy of the Initial Decision to all Parties of record, consistent with this Opinion and Order; **THEREFORE,**

IT IS ORDERED:

1. That the Final Order entered on August 23, 2023, at Docket No. F-2022-3036945, is rescinded, consistent with this Opinion and Order.
2. That the Commission's Secretary's Bureau shall serve a copy of this Opinion and Order on the Parties of record.
3. That the Commission's Secretary's Bureau shall re-serve a copy of the Initial Decision issued in this proceeding on all Parties of record along with a Secretarial Letter providing instructions for the filing of Exceptions and Reply Exceptions.
4. That, if the Parties file timely Exceptions in accordance with the Secretarial Letter accompanying the re-served Initial Decision, the Commission will consider the Exceptions and any Replies thereto.
5. That, if the Parties do not timely file Exceptions in accordance with the Secretarial Letter, then the matter may be handled in accordance with applicable law.

6. That, if the matter becomes final by operation of law, the Secretary's Bureau shall mark the proceeding at this docket closed.

BY THE COMMISSION,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rosemary Chiavetta". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rosemary Chiavetta
Secretary

(SEAL)

ORDER ADOPTED: December 21, 2023

ORDER ENTERED: December 21, 2023