



PHILADELPHIA GAS WORKS

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October 7, 2024

VIA ELECTRONIC FILING

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

Re: Debbie Esola v. Philadelphia Gas Works; Docket No. C-2024-3051193

Dear Secretary Chiavetta:

Enclosed for electronic filing please find Philadelphia Gas Works' Preliminary Objections to the Formal Complaint in the above-referenced matter. Copies to be served in accordance with the attached Certificate of Service.

Sincerely,

/s/ Graciela Christlieb

Graciela Christlieb, Esquire

Enclosure

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that I have this day served a true copy of Philadelphia Gas Works' Preliminary Objection upon the persons listed below in the manner indicated in accordance with the requirements of 52 Pa. Code §1.54 (relating to service by a party).

VIA FIRST CLASS MAIL AND ELECTRONIC MAIL

Debbie Esola
2537 South 8th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19148
debbiesola@yahoo.com

Date: October 7, 2024

/s/ Graciela Christlieb
Graciela Christlieb, Esquire

**BEFORE THE
PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION**

Debbie Esola,	:	
	:	
Complainant,	:	
	:	
v.	:	Docket No. C-2024-3051193
	:	
	:	
Philadelphia Gas Works,	:	
	:	
Respondent.	:	

NOTICE TO PLEAD

To: Debbie Esola
2537 South 8th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19148
debbiesola@yahoo.com

Pursuant to Pa. Code § 5.101, you are hereby notified that any answer to the enclosed Preliminary Objections of Philadelphia Gas Works must be filed within ten (10) days of the date of service of the Preliminary Objection.

All pleadings, such as an Answer to Preliminary Objections, must be filed with the Secretary of the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission with a copy served to counsel for PGW and, when applicable, the Administrative Law Judge or Special Agent presiding over the proceeding.

/s/ Graciela Christlieb

Graciela Christlieb, Esquire
Philadelphia Gas Works
800 W. Montgomery Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19122
graciela.christlieb@pgworks.com
Counsel for PGW

Date: October 7, 2024

**BEFORE THE
PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION**

Debbie Esola,	:	
Complainant,	:	
v.	:	Docket No. C-2024-3051193
	:	
Philadelphia Gas Works,	:	
Respondent.	:	

**PHILADELPHIA GAS WORKS’
PRELIMINARY OBJECTION TO FORMAL COMPLAINT**

Philadelphia Gas Works (“PGW” or “Respondent”) submits the following Preliminary Objection to the Formal Complaint of Debbie Esola (“Complainant”) served by the Secretary of the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (“Commission” or “PUC”) on September 16, 2024 (“Complaint”). Pursuant to 52 Pa. Code §§ 5.61, 5.62 & 5.101(d) of the Commission’s regulations, PGW filed an Answer with New Matter to the Complaint on this same date. In support of this Preliminary Objection, PGW states as follows:

I. INTRODUCTION

Complainant appears to be challenging PGW terminating the gas service and subsequently holding her responsible for debt incurred as a result of theft of gas service, which PGW did in 2018.

II. LEGAL STANDARDS FOR PRELIMINARY OBJECTIONS

1. The Commission’s Rules of Administrative Practice and Procedure permit the filing of preliminary objections.¹ The Commission’s procedure regarding the disposition of preliminary objections is similar to that utilized in Pennsylvania civil practice.²

2. Under Section 5.101(a) of the Commission’s regulations, preliminary objections must specifically state the legal and factual grounds relied upon and be limited to the following:

- (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;

¹ 52 Pa. Code § 5.101(a)(1)-(7). *Equitable Small Transportation Interveners v. Equitable Gas Company*, 1994 Pa. P.U.C. LEXIS 69, Docket No. C-00935435 (July 18, 1994).

² *Id.*

- (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; and
- (7) Standing of a party to participate in the proceeding.

3. The moving party may not rely on its own factual assertions but must accept for the purposes of disposition of the preliminary objection all well-pleaded, material facts of the other party, as well as every inference fairly deducible from those facts.³ However, the Commission need not accept as true conclusions of law, unwarranted inferences from facts, argumentative allegations or expressions of opinion.⁴

4. In deciding the preliminary objections, the Commission must determine whether, based on the well-pleaded factual averments of the party, recovery or relief is possible.⁵

III. PRELIMINARY OBJECTIONS BY PGW

5. PGW's responses to Paragraphs 1 to 7 of the Complaint are incorporated herein by reference. In addition, PGW's New Matter to the Complaint is also incorporated herein by reference as well as any exhibits attached thereto.

A. Dismissal Based on Lack of Commission Jurisdiction

6. Section 5.101(a)(1) of the Commission's regulations permits a party to file a preliminary objection based on the lack of Commission jurisdiction. To act on the Complaint, the Commission must have jurisdiction. The Commission, as a creation of the General Assembly, has only the powers and authority granted to it by the General Assembly contained in the Public Utility Code. The Commission must act within, and cannot exceed, its jurisdiction. Jurisdiction may not be conferred by the parties where none exists. Subject matter jurisdiction is a prerequisite to the exercise of power to decide a controversy.

7. The statute of limitations at 66 Pa.C.S. § 3314 is a jurisdictional issue. It requires that any complaint seeking relief under the Public Utility Code be brought within three years from the date at which the liability therefor arose. As a jurisdictional issue, the statute of limitations and the Commission's lack of jurisdiction may be raised at any time. *See, e.g., Application of*

³ County of Allegheny v. Cmwlth. of Pa., 490 A.2d 402 (Pa. 1985).

⁴ Stanton-Negley Drug Co. v. Dep't of Pub. Welfare, 927 A.2d 671, 673 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2007).

⁵ Department of Auditor General, et al. v. SERS, et al., 836 A.2d 1053, 1064 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2003); P.J.S. v. Pa. State Ethics Commission, 669 A.2d 1105 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1996).

Laurel Pipe Line Company, Docket No. A-2016-2575829 (Order entered July 12, 2018) and *Hasty v. Philadelphia Gas Works*, Docket No. C-2014-2419203 (Final Order entered January 27, 2015).

8. The Complainant filed informal complaints with the Commission’s Bureau of Consumer Services (“BCS”) on these issues in 2018 and 2019 and failed to appeal either decision dismissing those complaints by filing a formal complaint despite the BCS decision issued in 2019 explicitly instructing her to do so.

9. The gas service to the Service Address has been abandoned; there has been no gas service to the Service Address since 2018.

10. The Complainant filed the instant Complaint on August 29, 2024.

11. Any issues regarding the Complainant’s gas service prior to August 29, 2021 fall outside the applicable statutory period of limitation and is barred under 66 Pa.C.S. § 3314.

IV. CONCLUSION

WHEREFORE, PGW respectfully requests that this Commission grant PGW’s Preliminary Objection, dismiss issues raised in the Complaint regarding the balance transfer as beyond the statute of limitations, and grant any other relief to PGW that is deemed to be reasonable and appropriate.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Graciela Christlieb

Graciela Christlieb, Esquire
Philadelphia Gas Works
800 W. Montgomery Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19122
graciela.christlieb@pgworks.com

Date: October 7, 2024

Counsel for PGW