

**BEFORE THE  
PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION**

Deyde L. Montanez	:	
	:	
v.	:	C-2024-3051295
	:	
Duquesne Light Company	:	

**INITIAL DECISION**

Before  
Alphonso Arnold III  
Administrative Law Judge

**INTRODUCTION**

This Decision dismisses the Formal Complaint with prejudice for the failure of Complainant to appear for the hearing and prosecute the complaint.

**HISTORY OF THE PROCEEDING**

On September 20, 2024, Deyde L. Montanez (Complainant) filed a Formal Complaint (Complaint) with the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (Commission) against Duquesne Light Company (Respondent) alleging that there are incorrect charges on her bill.

In her complaint, Complainant selected the option to receive all communications from the Commission via eService through an eFiling account she registered with the Commission. Complaint ¶ 9.

On October 10, 2024, Respondent filed an Answer with New Matter, properly endorsed with a notice to plead, in which it denied the material allegations of fact and conclusions of law in the complaint. In its new matter, Respondent argued that Complainant was attempting to relitigate matters resolved in a prior formal complaint. Respondent requested that the complaint be dismissed.

Also on October 10, 2024, Respondent filed Preliminary Objections, properly endorsed with a notice to plead, to the complaint. In its Preliminary Objections, Duquesne sought to dismiss portions of the Complaint which relitigate issues previously addressed and resolved in a prior Formal Complaint proceeding and portions of the Complaint raising monetary damages.

Complainant did not file a reply to Respondent's New Matter or an answer to Respondent's Preliminary Objections.

On November 15, 2024, the Commission issued a Motion Judge Assignment Notice, assigning me as Presiding Officer over this proceeding.

On December 13, 2024, the Commission issued my Order Granting Preliminary Objections. My granting of the Preliminary Objections did not result in dismissal of the Complaint.

On December 17, 2024, a Call-In Telephone Hearing Notice was served on the parties scheduling an initial telephonic hearing on March 4, 2025.

Also on December 17, 2024, a Prehearing Order was served on the parties reminding the parties of the date and time of the hearing and informing them of the applicable procedural rules for the hearing.

On March 4, 2025, the hearing was convened as scheduled. Both parties appeared for the hearing. On the record, it was agreed that a further hearing would be scheduled and held so that an interpreter could be hired and present at the further hearing to translate on behalf of Complainant.

On March 5, 2025, a Further Call-In Telephone Hearing Notice was served on the parties scheduling a further telephonic hearing on May 6, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. The Hearing Notice provided the parties with the Toll-Free Bridge Number and the PIN to call and participate in the telephonic hearing. The Hearing Notice further stated as follows:

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

**CONTINUANCES.** You may request a continuance of the hearing if you have a good reason. All continuances will be granted only for good cause. To request a continuance, you must submit a written request (a “motion”) at least five (5) days before the hearing. Your motion should include: 1) The case name, number, and hearing date; 2) The reason for the request; and 3) Whether the other party agrees (or if you do not know).

Also on March 5, 2025, a Prehearing Order was served on the parties which reminded the parties of the date and time of the hearing. The Prehearing Order again stated the failure to appear warning. Additionally, the Prehearing Order informed the parties about the applicable procedural rules and again included the procedure to follow for hearing continuances.

The Hearing Notice and Prehearing Order were eServed to Complainant in the ordinary course of the Commission's business to the email address that was registered with the Commission by Complainant. Neither the Hearing Notice nor the Prehearing Order were returned to the Commission as undeliverable.

On May 6, 2025, the hearing convened as scheduled. Megan E. Rulli, Esquire, appeared on behalf of Respondent along with witnesses and was ready to proceed. The court reporter was also present. Complainant was not present to start the hearing. After a short recess to allow time for Complainant to appear, the hearing proceeded in Complainant's absence. No testimony was taken, and no exhibits were introduced into the record. At the hearing, Respondent moved to dismiss the Complaint with prejudice for Complainant's failure to appear and prosecute his Complaint. I took this motion under advisement.

Complainant has not contacted the Commission to explain why her failure to appear at the hearing was unavoidable.

The record closed on May 29, 2025, upon receipt of the electronic hearing transcript. This Decision grants Respondent's Motion to Dismiss the Complaint with prejudice.

#### FINDINGS OF FACT

1. Complainant is Deyde L. Montanez.
2. Respondent is Duquesne Light Company.
3. On September 20, 2024, Complainant filed a Formal Complaint against Respondent.

4. On October 10, 2024, Respondent filed an Answer with New Matter to the Complaint.

5. On March 4, 2025, both parties appeared for an evidentiary hearing where it was agreed that a further hearing would be scheduled and held so that an interpreter could be hired and present at the further hearing to translate on behalf of Complainant.

6. On March 5, 2025, a Call-In Telephone Hearing Notice was served on Complainant scheduling an initial telephonic hearing on May 6, 2025, at 10:00 a.m.

7. Also on March 5, 2025, a Prehearing Order for Telephone Hearing was served on Complainant providing additional information to the parties regarding the May 6, 2025, hearing.

8. Both the Hearing Notice and Prehearing Order were served on Complainant by eService to the email address Complainant provided to and registered with the Commission.

9. Both the Hearing Notice and Prehearing Order provided the Complainant with the toll-free bridge telephone number and PIN to call and participate in the hearing, and, *inter alia*, the procedure for requesting a continuance and the possible consequences of failing to appear at the hearing.

10. Neither the Hearing Notice nor the Prehearing Order were returned to the Commission as undeliverable.

11. Complainant failed to appear and participate in the scheduled telephonic hearing on May 6, 2025.

12. The court reporter, Counsel for Respondent and its witnesses were present and prepared to proceed at the May 6, 2025, hearing.

13. Complainant has not contacted the Commission to explain why her failure to appear at the hearing was unavoidable.

## DISCUSSION

### **Due Process and Notice**

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. Cmwlth. 1984). This due process requirement is satisfied when the parties are provided notice and the opportunity to be heard. *Id.*

The record shows that Complainant was provided notice and the opportunity to be heard. First, on March 5, 2025, Complainant was served a Hearing Notice which advised the parties of the date and time of the hearing, and how to participate. Second, also on March 5, 2025, Complainant was served a Prehearing Order which reminded the parties of the date and time of the hearing, and how to participate. Further, both documents advised the parties, *inter alia*, how to request a continuance prior to the hearing if needed. Finally, both documents advised Complainant that failure to appear may result in dismissal with prejudice, which means that Complainant would be barred from filing another complaint raising the same claim(s) and issues(s) presented in the dismissed complaint.

Both the Hearing Notice and Prehearing Order were eServed to the Complainant at the email address she registered with the Commission. Neither was returned to the Commission as undeliverable. Notice eServed to a party's registered email address with no notification that service failed is presumed to have been received. *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 Apr. 7, 2017); *Morella v. PECO Energy Co.*, Docket No. C-2016-2553416 (Final Order entered Jan. 31, 2017).

Complainant had notice of the hearing and an opportunity to be heard in this proceeding. Therefore, the Complainant's due process rights have been fully protected. *Sentner v. Bell Tel. Co. of Pa.*, Docket No. F-00161106 (Opinion and Order entered Oct. 25, 1993).

### **Failure to Appear, Waiver and the "Unavoidable" Standard**

Once a hearing is scheduled and the parties are duly notified by the Commission, it is the responsibility of the parties to appear and participate in the hearing. *Mumma v. PPL Elec. Utils. Corp.*, Docket No. C-00014869 (Opinion and Order entered Jan. 28, 2002). Both the Public Utility Code and the Commission's regulations provide that, after being notified, a party who fails to appear at a scheduled hearing shall be deemed to have waived the opportunity to participate in the hearing and shall not be permitted to later reopen the matter or be permitted to recall excused witnesses. 66 Pa.C.S. § 332(f); 52 Pa. Code § 5.245(a). However, these provisions in the Code and in the Commission's regulations do not apply if the presiding officer determines that the party's failure to appear at the hearing was unavoidable and that the interests of the other parties and of the public would not be prejudiced by permitting the reopening or further examination. 66 Pa.C.S. § 332(f); 52 Pa. Code § 5.245(b).

The party who failed to appear at the hearing has the burden of explaining why his/her failure to appear was unavoidable. 66 Pa.C.S. § 332(a); *Herr v. West Penn Power Co.*, Docket No. C-2021-3028202 (Opinion and Order entered Sept. 15, 2022). When there are no facts in the record that the party's failure to appear was unavoidable, the complaint should be dismissed with prejudice. *Brown v. PECO Energy Co.*, Docket No. C-2019-3009486 (Opinion and Order entered Apr. 22, 2022); *Little v. Pittsburgh Water & Sewer Auth.*, Docket No. F-2021-3027107 (Opinion and Order entered Feb. 7, 2022); *Williams v. PECO Energy Co.*, Docket No. C-2018-3000734 (Opinion and Order entered Mar. 14, 2019); *Jefferson v. UGI Utils., Inc.*, Docket No. Z-00269892 (Opinion and Order entered Dec. 26, 1995); 66 Pa.C.S. § 332(f); 52 Pa. Code § 5.245(a).

Complainant failed to appear for the hearing despite receiving notice and despite the undersigned allowing additional time for Complainant to appear. To date, there has been no communication to the Office of Administrative Law Judge or me by, or on behalf of, Complainant explaining why Complainant's failure to appear at the hearing was unavoidable.

Consequently, I find that Complainant waived the opportunity to participate in a hearing on the matters raised in the Complaint, Complainant's absence was not unavoidable, and the Complaint should be dismissed with prejudice.

### **Burden of Proof and Dismissal of Complaint**

Section 332(a) of the Public Utility Code provides that the party seeking relief from the Commission has the burden of proof. 66 Pa.C.S. § 332(a). To establish a sufficient case and satisfy the burden of proof, the complainant must show that the respondent public utility is responsible or accountable for the problem described in the complaint. *Patterson v. Bell Tel. Co. of Pa.*, 72 Pa.P.U.C. 196 (1990); *Feinstein v. Phila. Suburban Water Co.*, 50 Pa.P.U.C. 300 (1976). Such a showing must be by a

preponderance of the evidence. *Samuel J. Lansberry, Inc. v. Pa. Pub. Util. Comm'n*, 578 A.2d 600 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1990). A preponderance of the evidence is established by presenting evidence more convincing, by even the smallest amount, than that presented by the other party. *Se-Ling Hosiery v. Margulies*, 70 A.2d 854 (Pa. 1950).

As the proponent of any request for relief, Complainant bears the burden of proof. By failing to participate and proffer any evidence to support the complaint, Complainant has failed to meet this burden. Thus, it is appropriate to dismiss the Complaint with prejudice. *Brown v. PECO Energy Co.*, Docket No. C-2019-3009486 (Opinion and Order entered Apr. 22, 2022); *Williams v. PECO Energy Co.*, Docket No. C-2018-300734 (Opinion and Order entered Mar. 14, 2019) (citing *Jefferson v. UGI Utils., Inc.*, Docket No. Z-00269892 (Opinion and Order entered Dec. 26, 1995)). Accordingly, the merits of the complaint will not be addressed.

Respondent's Motion to Dismiss with prejudice will be granted.

#### CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

1. The Commission has jurisdiction over the subject matter of and the parties to this proceeding. 66 Pa.C.S. § 701.

2. The Commission is required to provide due process to the parties appearing before them; this due process requirement is satisfied when the parties are provided notice and the opportunity to be heard. *Schneider v. Pa. Pub. Util. Comm'n*, 479 A.2d 10 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1984).

3. Notice eServed to a party's registered email address with no notification that service failed to be delivered to that email address is presumed to have been received. *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 Apr. 7, 2017); *Morella v. PECO Energy Co.*, Docket No. C-2016-2553416 (Final Order entered Jan. 31, 2017).

4. After being notified, a party who fails to appear at a scheduled hearing shall be deemed to have waived the opportunity to participate in the hearing and shall not be permitted to later reopen the matter or be permitted to recall excused witnesses. 66 Pa.C.S. § 332(f); 52 Pa. Code § 5.245(a).

5. If there are no facts in the record that a party's failure to appear at a hearing was unavoidable, the complaint should be dismissed with prejudice. *Brown v. PECO Energy Co.*, Docket No. C-2019-3009486 (Opinion and Order entered Apr. 22, 2022); *Little v. Pittsburgh Water & Sewer Auth.*, Docket No. F-2021-3027107 (Opinion and Order entered Feb. 7, 2022); *Williams v. PECO Energy Co.*, Docket No. C-2018-3000734 (Opinion and Order entered Mar. 14, 2019); *Jefferson v. UGI Utils., Inc.*, Docket No. Z-00269892 (Opinion and Order entered Dec. 26, 1995).

6. Complainant's due process rights have been fully protected and Complainant's failure to appear was not unavoidable. *Schneider v. Pa. Pub. Util. Comm'n*, 479 A.2d 10 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1984); 66 Pa.C.S. § 332(f); 52 Pa. Code § 5.245(a).

7. As the party seeking relief, Complainant bears the burden of proof by a preponderance of the evidence. 66 Pa.C.S. § 332(a); *Se-Ling Hosiery v. Margulies*, 70 A.2d 854 (Pa. 1950).

8. By failing to participate in the hearing and proffer any evidence to support the complaint, Complainant has failed to meet the burden of proof. 66 Pa.C.S. § 332(a).

