

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

Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission, *et al.*

**Public Meeting held December 4, 2025
3053499-OSA
Docket Nos. R-2025-3053499, *et al.***

v.

Columbia Gas of Pennsylvania, Inc.

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN STEPHEN M. DeFRANK

Before the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (Commission) for disposition is the requested base rate increase of Columbia Gas of Pennsylvania, Inc. (Columbia or Company), the Company's 13th requested increase since 2008. To place Columbia's rate case filing frequency in further context, I joined this Commission in October 2022 and this matter is the third instance in three years where a request from Columbia to increase its rates has appeared before me.¹ Despite the frequency of Columbia's rate increase requests, the Company seeks to increase its total annual natural gas distribution operating revenues by over \$110 million, or approximately 12.02% over revenues at present rates. This includes a request for an astounding 85% increase to the monthly residential charge – from \$17.25 to \$31.97 per month. Columbia's current monthly residential charge is already the highest among Pennsylvania natural gas distribution companies.

I am concerned that Columbia is losing sight of the importance of customer affordability. The most recently released Consumer Price Index report reveals a 3% increase in prices for the 12-months ending September 2025.² From food to medical care to utilities, consumer pricing for essential goods and services is rising. The frequency and steepness of Columbia's requested rate increases is agnostic to this reality.

Moreover, the effect of the frequency of Columbia's rate increases is compounded by the low participation in Columbia's customer assistance programs (CAP). As of December 2024, only 30% of Columbia's confirmed low-income customers and 23% of its estimated low-income customers were enrolled in the Company's CAP. One of the recommendations in this matter that I will be voting to approve is an additional screening process designed to identify eligible customers for enrollment into Columbia's CAP.

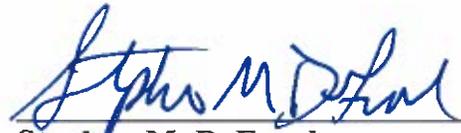
¹ See R-2022-3031211, R-2024-3046519, R-2025-3053499.

² [Consumer prices up 3.0 percent from September 2024 to September 2025 : The Economics Daily: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)

Columbia claims that a driver for its rate case frequency is due to the replacement of aging pipe. Modernizing distribution infrastructure, especially infrastructure that is nearing the end of its useful life and could be at risk for failure, is important to address safety and reliability. I have led efforts to require natural gas public utilities to identify at-risk, older plastic pipe and related components, and to encourage their accelerated replacement.³ However, the recovery of such investments must be balanced with customer affordability. Additionally, I strongly encourage Columbia to use available tools like the distribution system improvement charge to make timely and cost-efficient repairs and replacements.

On balance, I am voting to support an increase that is roughly 50% of what the Company requested. This reduced amount is sufficient to enable the Company to provide safe and reliable service while being cognizant of consumer affordability.

Date: December 4, 2025



Stephen M. DeFrank

³ *Replacement of Older Plastic Pipe in Natural Gas Distribution Systems*, Docket No. M-2024-3050313.