

Comment by Sally Jane Gellert, Bergen (New Jersey)

Re: Docket No. M-2025-3054271

Although I am a New Jersey resident, I know that communities look to each other for best practices—and limiting or even banning data centers, at least until energy and water issues are sorted out, is incredibly important in all of our communities. A solid business will last; there is no need to rush to accommodate it. Pushing for a quick action before all factors are considered is a hallmark of a potential bust cycle not far down the road.

I support the following statement from the Better Path Coalition and No False Climate Solutions PA. “The problems being addressed in PUC’s tentative order are largely manufactured ones resulting from the state’s rush to get into the data center business before the boom goes bust. As is too often the case, the public is only engaged after the big decisions are made. Our first opportunity to comment comes when the only things left to decide are how to deal with the new project/business/industry. At that point, advancement of the thing under consideration is taken to be an inevitability when it really isn’t. Therefore, we feel it is important to state up front that we oppose the approval of hyperscale data centers in Pennsylvania based on many well-documented concerns about their environmental, health, safety, climate, quality of life, economic, and ethical impacts that scattershot regulations across agencies, in this case tariffs, cannot address. Our regulatory agencies should be our advocates, using their expertise to stop the state from creating preventable problems rather than resigning themselves to managing them.”

AI is the new shiny thing, its reflections may well be blinding us to a lot of dangers, not just energy and water use. How to ensure that it does not replace human jobs; that its output is not used without human verification, and that it is indeed limited to the routine, algorithmic actions that computers have traditionally done, and anything beyond that is clearly labelled is still being debated—lets resolve those issues before rushing forward.

Electricity generation is not regulated in Pennsylvania, so the tariff only pertains to distribution costs. If approved, the tariff would not protect the public from generation costs which account for roughly 45% of consumer energy bills. Carnegie Mellon and its research partners projected that electricity generation costs will increase by as much as 25% by 2030., According to the Bipartisan Policy Center, “The exact trajectory of future electricity use by data centers is unknown due to 1) improvements in AI system efficiency; 2) the unpredictability of demand for AI services; and 3) limits in manufacturing production capacity of AI chips, servers, and associated infrastructure.” The PUC is operating in the dark as it attempts to establish a tariff.

Natural gas would be used to power data centers. Methane leaks occurring at every step of natural gas production, transmission, and distribution exacerbate climate change. Hundreds of thousands of legacy wells leaking methane unchecked further add to the state's contribution to the climate crisis. Continued and even increased natural gas production to power data centers is unacceptable., According to Carnegie Mellon and its research partners, "Power sector emissions could increase 30% compared to scenarios without data center growth, reaching 275 million metric tonnes of CO2 annually by 2030. That matches the entire annual carbon output of France.", Carnegie Mellon and its research partners say that already "Virginia's data center growth drives increased fossil fuel use in nearby states like Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia, potentially undermining state and regional climate goals."

Throughout the discussion of the tentative order, the PUC's disposition fell short of imposing the most stringent requirements on large load customers. Therefore, the tentative order is weak and inadequate.

Take the time; get this right.