

**BEFORE THE  
PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION**

James Richel

v.

Duquesne Light Company

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C-2025-3056539

**INITIAL DECISION**

Before  
Jeffrey A. Watson  
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 July 29, 2025, James Richel (Complainant) filed a Formal Complaint (Complaint) with the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (Commission) against Duquesne Light Company (Respondent or Company). The Complaint alleges that Respondent threatened to terminate his electric service and the existence of incorrect charges on his electric utility bill.

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

On August 18, 2025, Respondent filed an answer in which it denied the material allegations set forth in the Complaint. Respondent requested that the Complaint be dismissed.

On August 25, 2025, a Call-In Telephone Hearing Notice was served on the parties scheduling an initial telephonic hearing on October 15, 2025, at 10:00 a.m., and the case was assigned to me. In addition, on August 25, 2025, a Prehearing Order was entered which advised the Parties of the hearing scheduled for October 15, 2025, and which provided the Toll-Free Bridge Number and the PIN to call and participate in the telephonic hearing. Both the Hearing Notice and the Prehearing Order 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).

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 was returned to the Commission as undeliverable.

On October 15, 2025, I convened the hearing as scheduled. Sophia Al Rasheed, Esquire, appeared on behalf of Respondent along with one witness and was ready to proceed. The court reporter was also present. Complainant was not present at the start of 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. Tr. 7

I advised Respondent that I would issue a decision in this proceeding.

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

The record closed on November 12, 2025, upon receipt of the hearing transcript by the presiding officer. This decision grants Respondent's motion to dismiss the Complaint with prejudice.

#### FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The Complainant is James Richel.
2. The Respondent is Duquesne Light Company.
3. On July 29, 2025, Complainant filed a Formal Complaint against Respondent.

4. On August 18, 2025, Respondent filed an answer to the complaint.

5. On August 25, 2025, a Call-In Telephone Hearing Notice was served on Complainant scheduling an initial telephonic hearing on October 15, 2025, at 10:00 a.m.

6. On August 25, 2025, a Prehearing Order was entered providing prehearing instructions to the Parties and advising the Parties of the scheduling of the telephonic hearing for October 15, 2025, at 10:00 a.m.

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

8. Both the Hearing Notice and the Prehearing Order were provided to 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.

9. Neither the Hearing Notice nor the Prehearing Order was returned to the Commission as undeliverable.

10. Complainant failed to appear and participate in the scheduled telephonic hearing on October 15, 2025.

11. The court reporter, Counsel for Respondent and its witness were present and prepared to proceed at the October 15, 2025 hearing.

12. Complainant has not contacted the Commission to explain why his 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 August 25, 2025, the Commission served Complainant a Hearing Notice which advised the parties of the date and time of the hearing, and how to participate. Second, on August 25, 2025, the Commission also served Complainant a Prehearing Order advising that the hearing was scheduled and providing instructions regarding participation at the hearing. 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 the dismissal of the Complaint with prejudice, which means that Complainant would be barred from filing another complaint raising the same claims and issues presented in the dismissed complaint.

Both the Hearing Notice and the Prehearing Order were eServed to Complainant at the email address he registered with the Commission. Neither document 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, 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) (*Brown*); *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) (*Williams*); *Jefferson v. UGI Utils., Inc.*, Docket No. Z-00269892 (Opinion and Order entered Dec. 26, 1995) (*Jefferson*); 66 Pa.C.S. § 332(f); 52 Pa. Code § 5.245(a).

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

Consequently, under the circumstances, 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, a 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; Williams* (citing *Jefferson*). Accordingly, the merits of the complaint will not be addressed.

Respondent's motion to dismiss the Complaint 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).

