

**BEFORE THE
PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION**

Charlene Johnson	:	
	:	
v.	:	C-2025-3054975
	:	
Peoples Natural Gas Company LLC	:	

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 April 22, 2025, Charlene Johnson (Complainant or Ms. Johnson) filed a Formal Complaint (Complaint) against Peoples Natural Gas Company LLC., (Peoples or Respondent) alleging property damage at a house located at 749 Griffith Street, Aliquippa, PA 15003 (property, service address or service location) caused by Respondent. Complainant was identified on the Complaint form as Terrell Taylor – Charlene Johnson. The verification was signed Charlene Johnson c/o Terrell Taylor.

The Complaint alleges that on November 19, 2024, Ms. Johnson called Peoples to have gas turned on at the service address and asked for a 15-minute call. Complaint ¶ 4. She averred Respondent did not call and when Complainant called back, she was told the gas was on. *Id.* Complainant said she asked if Respondent checks the stove and was told no. *Id.* Complainant averred the gas was not turned on and pipes in the house subsequently broke, causing significant damage to the property. *Id.* Complainant averred she paid Respondent \$145.94. *Id.*

For relief, Complainant requests that Respondent pay for all of the damage to the house resulting from the broken pipes. Complaint ¶ 5.

In her Complaint, Complainant selected the option to receive all communications from the Commission via First-Class Mail at the address provided by the Complainant on the complaint. Complaint ¶ 9.

On May 29, 2025, Respondent filed an Answer to the Complaint and Preliminary Objections. In its Answer, Respondent essentially denies the material allegations set forth in the Complaint and denies liability to Complainant.

In its Preliminary Objections, Respondent avers it is unclear what Complainant's ownership interest is in the Property, if any, and that it appears that the Complaint was filed by the Complainant on behalf of her son and that Complainant does not reside at the property. Preliminary Objections ¶ 3. Respondent avers Complainant seeks compensatory damages for the alleged losses, including repairs of all damage to the Property due to an alleged ruptured water pipe. *Id.* ¶ 4. Respondent argues the requested relief is essentially a request for monetary compensation or other consideration being paid to Complainant and/or her son or the owner of the Property. *Id.* ¶ 12.

On June 27, 2025, this case was assigned to the undersigned presiding officer for disposition of the Preliminary Objections filed in this proceeding.

Respondent, in its Preliminary Objections, objected to the Complaint on the grounds that the subject matter of the complaint is beyond the jurisdiction of the Public Utility Commission (Commission). Preliminary Objections ¶ 7. Respondent argued the Commission is without authorization to grant the Complainant's request for damages, and the Complaint included impertinent matter in its requested relief. *Id.* ¶ 12. Therefore, Peoples moved to strike the Complainant's request for compensation. *Id.* ¶ 13.

Complainant did not file a response to the Answer or Preliminary Objections.

On September 25, 2025, an Interim Order was entered granting in part and denying in part the Preliminary Objections of Respondent. Respondent's motion to dismiss Complainant's request for money damages from the formal complaint filed by Complainant was granted. The Preliminary Objections were denied to the extent that the Preliminary Objections sought to prohibit Complainant from introducing any testimony or exhibits at any evidentiary hearing regarding the alleged damages, as it related to any unreasonable service claim, subject to any objections raised prior to or raised at the hearing in this proceeding.

On December 8, 2025, a Call-In Telephone Hearing Notice was served on the parties scheduling an initial telephonic hearing on February 11, 2026 at 10:00 a.m. and the case was assigned to me. 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).

On December 8, 2025, a Prehearing Order was served on the parties which reminded the parties of the date and time of the hearing. The Prehearing Order also stated the potential consequences if a party failed to appear at the hearing. Additionally, the Prehearing Order informed the parties about the applicable procedural rules and again included the procedure to follow for hearing continuances.

In the ordinary course of the Commission’s business, the Hearing Notice and Prehearing Order were served via U.S. First-Class Mail to Complainant at the street address provided by her to the Commission. The Commission did not receive any return mail that the Hearing Notice or the Prehearing Order sent to Complainant’s address was undeliverable.

On February 11, 2026, I convened the hearing as scheduled. Jennifer Petrisek, Esquire, appeared on behalf of Respondent along with her 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 her complaint. Tr. 6. 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 February 11, 2026.¹ This decision grants the Respondent's motion to dismiss the complaint with prejudice.

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The Complainant is Charlene Johnson.
2. The Respondent is Peoples Natural Gas Company LLC.
3. On April 22, 2025, Complainant filed a Formal Complaint against Respondent.
4. On May 29, 2025, Respondent filed an answer to the complaint.
5. On December 8, 2025, a Call-In Telephone Hearing Notice was served on Complainant scheduling an initial telephonic hearing on February 11, 2026 at 10:00 a.m.
6. On December 8, 2025, a Prehearing Order for Telephone Hearing was served on Complainant providing additional information to the parties regarding the hearing.

¹ The record closed at the conclusion of the hearing. 52 Pa. Code § 5.431(a).

7. Both the Hearing Notice and Prehearing Order were served on Complainant by U.S. First-Class Mail to the postal address Complainant provided to the Commission.

8. 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.

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

10. Complainant failed to appear and participate in the scheduled telephonic hearing on February 11, 2026.

11. The court reporter, Counsel for Respondent and its witness were present and prepared to proceed at the February 11, 2026 hearing.

12. 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 December 8, 2025, the Commission served the Complainant a Hearing Notice which advised the parties of the date and time of the hearing, and how to participate. Second, on December 8, 2025, the Commission served the Complainant 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 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 Prehearing Order were served by U.S. First-Class Mail to the address provided on the complaint. Neither document was returned as being undeliverable. Accordingly, it must be presumed that this mail was received by Complainant. *Berkowitz v. Mayflower Sec., Inc.*, 317 A.2d 584 (Pa. 1974); *Meierdierck v. Miller*, 147 A.2d 406 (Pa. 1959); *Samaras v. Hartwick*, 698 A.2d 71 (Pa. Super. 1997); *Judge v. Celina Mut. Ins. Co.*, 449 A.2d 658 (Pa. Super. 1982).

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. W. 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, 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 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 mailed via U.S. First-Class Mail to a party and not returned to the Commission as undeliverable is presumed received. *Berkowitz v. Mayflower Sec., Inc.*, 317 A.2d 584 (Pa. 1974); *Meierdierck v. Miller*, 147 A.2d 406 (Pa. 1959); *Samaras v. Hartwick*, 698 A.2d 71 (Pa. Super. 1997); *Judge v. Celina Mut. Ins. Co.*, 449 A.2d 658 (Pa. Super. 1982).

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).

ORDER

THEREFORE,

IT IS ORDERED:

1. That Peoples Natural Gas Company LLC's motion to dismiss the Formal Complaint of Charlene Johnson with prejudice, at Docket No. C-2025-3054975, is granted.

2. That the Formal Complaint filed by Charlene Johnson in *Charlene Johnson v. Peoples Natural Gas Company LLC*, Docket No. C-2025-3054975, is hereby dismissed with prejudice.

