

**BEFORE THE
PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION**

Stephanie Martzen	:	
	:	
v.	:	C-2025-3057001
	:	
PPL Electric Utilities Corporation	:	

INITIAL DECISION

Before
John M. Coogan
Administrative Law Judge

INTRODUCTION

This Initial Decision denies a Formal Complaint that alleges incorrect charges on an electric utility bill because the Complainant failed to meet her burden of proving, by a preponderance of the evidence, that the electric utility violated the Public Utility Code, the Commission’s regulations, or an order of the Commission.

HISTORY OF THE PROCEEDING

On August 21, 2025, Stephanie Martzen (Ms. Martzen or Complainant) filed a Formal Complaint (Complaint) with the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (Commission) against PPL Electric Utilities Corporation (PPL or Company). Ms. Martzen’s Formal Complaint was served on PPL on August 22, 2025. Ms. Martzen alleged that PPL is threatening to shut off her service or has already shut off her service; that there are incorrect charges on her bill; that PPL is claiming there is foreign wiring,

that PPL will not put the account in the correct person's name, and that PPL has added charges to the account for another person. Complaint ¶ 4. As relief, Ms. Martzen stated that she will pay the portion that belongs to her, but she does not operate the farm, the account should be in the operator's name, and she would like the portion that was added removed. *Id.* ¶ 5.

On September 11, 2025, PPL filed an answer to Ms. Martzen's Formal Complaint. PPL admitted that a termination notice was issued on August 14, 2025. Answer ¶ 4. PPL denied that Complainant's electric service bill(s) contain incorrect charges. *Id.* PPL also denied that the Company informed a family member of the Complainant that there was foreign wiring. *Id.* PPL asserts that, based on the Company's investigation into the service address, PPL concluded that the Complainant was associated with the balance accrued at the property under three prior accounts such that she is responsible for the unpaid balance on these accounts. *Id.*

On September 19, 2025, the Commission issued an Initial Telephonic Hearing Notice setting a formal call-in telephonic hearing for this matter for November 5, 2025 and assigned me as the presiding officer. In anticipation of that hearing, I issued a Prehearing Order on September 19, 2025 setting forth various rules that would govern that proceeding.

The hearing convened on November 5, 2025 as scheduled. Ms. Martzen appeared, representing herself. Hayley Wilburn, Esq., appeared on behalf of PPL. At the hearing, the parties jointly requested a continuance to allow further settlement discussions, which I granted. Tr. 7-8.

On November 6, 2025, the Commission issued a Further Telephonic Hearing Notice setting a further call-in telephonic hearing for this matter for January 13, 2026 in the event the matter did not settle. In anticipation of that hearing, I issued a

Prehearing Order on November 6, 2025 setting forth various rules that would govern that proceeding.

On November 7, 2025, I issued a Continuance Order which memorialized the continuance I granted the parties at the November 5, 2025 hearing.

The further hearing was convened on January 13, 2026, as scheduled. Ms. Martzen appeared and testified on her own behalf. Ms. Martzen did not move for admission of any exhibits into the record. Hayley E. Wilburn, Esquire, appeared at the hearing on behalf of PPL, along with one witness: Wendy Hendricks, Customer Service Representative for PPL. The following seven exhibits were admitted into the record on behalf of PPL:

PPL Exhibit 1 – Account Activity Report
PPL Exhibit 2 – Account Contacts
PPL Exhibit 3 – History of Payment Agreements
PPL Exhibit 5 – Responsible Occupant Letter
PPL Exhibit 10 – Stephanie Martzen Credit Report
PPL Exhibit 14 – Commercial Termination Notice Form Letter
PPL Exhibit 15 – Rate Review Letter

The record in this case consists of the above-referenced exhibits and a transcript of 92 pages. The record closed on February 2, 2026, when the transcript was filed. For the reasons discussed below, the Formal Complaint will be denied.

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The Complainant is Stephanie Martzen.
2. The Respondent is PPL Electric Utilities Corporation.

3. The property that is receiving service from PPL that is the subject of the Formal Complaint is 299 Little Keen Road, Waymart, PA 18472 (Service Address). Formal Complaint, ¶ 1; Tr. 29-30.
4. Ms. Martzen co-owns the Service Address along with her sister and sister's husband. Tr. 34-35.
5. Ms. Martzen has co-owned the Service Address since April 2023. Tr. 19.
6. Three PPL meters have been located at the Service Address over the past three years (Meters #1, #2 and #3). Tr. 79-80.
7. Meter #1 serves a dairy barn. Tr. 79-80.
8. Meter #2 served a residential house. Tr. 79-80.
9. The residential house served by Meter #2 burned down on January 16, 2025. Tr. 27.
10. On January 16, 2025, PPL removed Meter #2 from the Service Address. Tr. 79-80.
11. On April 16, 2025, PPL installed a meter serving a well that serves the dairy barn (Meter #3). Tr. 78-79.
12. Ms. Martzen's Complaint concerns PPL service to the dairy barn through Meter #1. PPL Exhibit 1; Tr. 24, 73, 77.

13. The dairy farm business operating at the Service Address, Tradale Dairy, is a sole proprietorship owned by Ms. Martzen's sister, Ann Trapper. Tr. 31, 37.

14. As of December 22, 2025, Ms. Martzen's balance with PPL for electric service was \$15,052.05. PPL Exhibit 1.

15. The \$15,052.05 total includes balances of \$3,184.57, \$247.24, and \$4,522.19, transferred to Ms. Martzen on February 3, 2025, for previous electric service to Meter # 1 at the Service Address. PPL Exhibit 1; Tr. 73, 77.

16. The transferred balance of \$3,184.57 accrued from April 26, 2024 to October 24, 2024 in the name of Gertrude Martzen. Tr. 71.

17. Gertude Martzen is Ms. Martzen's mother. Tr. 26.

18. The transferred balance of \$247.24 accrued from October 27, 2022 to November 8, 2022 in the name of Paul Martzen. Tr. 71.

19. Paul Martzen is Ms. Martzen's father. Tr. 26.

20. The transferred balance of \$4,522.19 accrued from October 23, 2024 through January 24, 2025 in the name of Martzen Livestock. Tr. 71.

21. Martzen Livestock was a business run by Ms. Martzen and her brother. Tr. 30.

22. Ms. Martzen established service in her name for Meter # 1 on January 23, 2025. PPL Exhibit 1.

23. Ms. Martzen's service for Meter # 1 is a commercial account. PPL Exhibit 1; Tr. 50.

24. PPL billed Ann Trapper and Martzen Livestock for service from Meter # 2. Tr. 80.

25. PPL bills Ann Trapper for service from Meter # 3. Tr. 77-78.

DISCUSSION

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). "Burden of proof" means a duty to establish a fact by a preponderance of the evidence, or evidence more convincing, by even the smallest degree, than the evidence presented by the other party. *Se-Ling Hosiery v. Margulies*, 70 A.2d 854 (Pa. 1950). As a matter of law, a complainant must show that the named utility is responsible or accountable for the problem described in the complaint in order to prevail. *Patterson v. Bell Tel. Co. of Pa.*, 72 Pa.P.U.C. 196 (1990). The offense must be a violation of the Public Utility Code, the Commission's regulations, or an outstanding order of the Commission. 66 Pa.C.S. § 701. In this proceeding, Ms. Martzen filed a Complaint against PPL. Therefore, Ms. Martzen bears the burden of proof in this proceeding.

Any decision of the Commission must be supported by substantial evidence. 2 Pa.C.S. § 704. "Substantial evidence" is such relevant evidence that a reasonable mind might accept as adequate to support a conclusion. More is required than a mere trace of evidence or a suspicion of the existence of a fact sought to be established. *Norfolk & W. Ry. Co. v. Pa. Pub. Util. Comm'n*, 413 A.2d 1037 (Pa. 1980); *Erie Resistor Corp. v. Unemployment Comp. Bd. of Rev.*, 166 A.2d 96 (Pa. Super. 1961); *Murphy v. Dept. of Pub. Welfare, White Haven Ctr.*, 480 A.2d 382 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1984).

Incorrect Charges

Ms. Martzen's Complaint alleged there are incorrect charges on her PPL bill. Complaint ¶ 4. Although the Complaint did not have much detail, it alleged that PPL stated there is foreign wiring and the account included charges for another person. *Id.* Ms. Martzen averred that she would pay the portion that belongs to her, but she does not "operate the farm", the account should be in the operator's name, and she would like the portion that was added removed. *Id.* ¶ 5. PPL's Answer denied it informed a family member of the Complainant that there was foreign wiring. Answer ¶ 4. Instead, PPL claimed that service to the address that is the subject of the Complaint has been transferred in and out of several different names which, upon information and belief, are all either members of the Martzen family or are businesses owned by the Martzen family, while the balances on these accounts often remain unpaid. *Id.*

The evidentiary hearing provided further context for Ms. Martzen's Complaint. The Service Address is co-owned by Ms. Martzen along with her sister and brother-in-law. Tr. 34-35. Three PPL meters have been located at the Service Address over the past three years, i.e., Meters #1, #2, and #3. Tr. 79-80. Meter #1 serves a dairy barn. Tr. 79-80. Meter #2 served a residential house until the house burned down on January 16, 2025. Tr. 27, 79-80.¹ Meter #3 serves a well that serves the dairy barn. Tr. 78-79.

Ms. Martzen's Complaint concerns commercial PPL service to the dairy barn through Meter #1. PPL Exhibit 1; Tr. 24, 50, 73, 77. The dairy farm business operating at the Service Address, Tradale Dairy, is a sole proprietorship owned by Ms. Martzen's sister, Ann Trapper. Tr. 31, 37.

¹ Ms. Martzen averred that Meter #2 served both the residential house and the well. Tr. 38. However, that averment is not germane to this discussion, since the bill in dispute is for Meter #1.

In response to questioning why she established service in her name, Ms. Martzen stated:

Just to keep service on. My sister doesn't have the best credit. I believe she was in bankruptcy at the time, and I was just doing a favor to put it in my name. And ultimately, I did technically own the property, along with her and her husband. So it was just to – you know, in the best interest of the business for him and her.

Tr. 34.

Ms. Martzen is not disputing her liability for charges incurred since she established service in her name or that her claims concern commercial service to the dairy barn. Instead, Ms. Martzen disputes her responsibility for charges previously incurred for the same commercial service under different names. Tr. 20-21.²

The balances in dispute here include \$3,184.57, \$247.24, and \$4,522.19, transferred to Ms. Martzen on February 3, 2025, for previous electric service to Meter #1 at the Service Address. PPL Exhibit 1; Tr. 73, 77. The transferred balance of \$3,184.57 accrued from April 26, 2024 to October 24, 2024, in the name of Gertrude Martzen, who is Ms. Martzen's mother. Tr. 26, 71. The transferred balance of \$247.24 accrued from October 27, 2022 to November 8, 2022 in the name of Paul Martzen, who is Ms. Martzen's father. Tr. 26, 71. The transferred balance of \$4,522.19 accrued from October 23, 2024 through January 24, 2025 in the name of Martzen Livestock, which was a business run by

² Under certain circumstances, the Commission's regulations prohibit a public utility from requiring payment for *residential* service previously furnished under an account in the name of a person other than the applicant. 52 Pa. Code § 56.35(b)(1). However, as discussed above, Ms. Martzen's Complaint concerns a commercial account. Commission regulations do not include a corollary provision to 52 Pa. Code § 56.35(b)(1) for commercial service and responsibility for balances previously accrued under different names.

Ms. Martzen and her brother. Tr. 30, 71. Therefore, all of these balances accrued in the name of Ms. Martzen's family members and, possibly, directly by Ms. Martzen herself as it concerns Martzen Livestock.³

Although the disputed balances are in three different names, the disputed balances all concern service provided to a dairy business run by Ms. Martzen's sister. The facts in this case are unique, but it does raise familiar "name game" concerns. The "name game" is a form of abuse of the administrative system where a member of a family steps in when a bill gets too high and takes over the utility account, thereby unlawfully relieving the family of the payment of the first bill, and then starts afresh. *Navarro v. PECO Energy Co.*, Docket No. F-2017-2610789 (Final Order entered March 27, 2018); *Manu v. Phila. Gas Works*, Docket No. F-2010-2191737 (Final Order entered July 24, 2012); *see also Molyneaux v. PPL Elec. Util. Corp.*, Docket No. F-01117535 (Opinion and Order entered Jan. 19, 2005). Similarly, here, the record indicates that Ms. Martzen is the latest in a pattern of family members placing service in a name different than the dairy business. Ms. Martzen does not dispute that she placed service to Meter #1 in her name for the benefit of the dairy business. To the contrary, as is cited above, Ms. Martzen readily admits that she took responsibility for the bill for the benefit of her family and the dairy business. Tr. 34. Additionally, as Ms. Martzen also admits, she co-owns the property where the dairy business is located. Tr. 35.

Accordingly, I do not find that Ms. Martzen met her burden of proof that there are incorrect charges on her PPL bills. As this proceeding demonstrates, Ms. Martzen was fully aware that she was establishing service in her name for the benefit of

³ In what form Martzen Livestock was or is constituted as a business is unclear from the hearing. Tr. 30-31, 41. Additionally, Ms. Martzen refuted any current involvement with Martzen Livestock and estimated that the business ended in approximately 2010. Tr. 42-44. Therefore, how "Martzen Livestock," the presumably defunct business, accrued a balance between October 23, 2024 and January 24, 2025, is also unclear.

the dairy business. The disputed balances have all accrued for the benefit of the dairy business. To allow Ms. Martzen to avoid responsibility for the disputed balances would be to absolve the previous debts of the dairy business when, as discussed above, the actual beneficiary of service under different names has been the dairy business. PPL has the right to bill and receive payment for the utility service it has provided to the dairy business. 66 Pa.C.S. § 1303; *Neal v. Phila. Gas Works*, Docket No. Z-00871874 (Final Order entered Jan. 4, 2002); *Angie's Bar v. Duquesne Light Co.*, 72 Pa.P.U.C. 213 (1990). Otherwise, unpaid customer bills are included in the utility's uncollectibles expense and, ultimately, paid for by the other remaining utility customers. *Potora v. UGI Utils., Inc.*, Docket No. C-2024-3050151 (Opinion and Order entered Apr. 30, 2025) (citing *Mill v. Pa. Pub. Util. Comm'n*, 447 A.2d (Pa. Cmwlth. 1982); *Scaccia v. West Penn Power Co.*, 55 Pa.P.U.C. 637 (1982)). Therefore, Ms. Martzen's Complaint will be denied.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

1. The Commission has jurisdiction over the subject matter and the parties to this proceeding. 66 Pa.C.S. § 701.
2. The party seeking relief from the Commission has the burden of proof. 66 Pa.C.S. § 332(a).
3. "Burden of proof" means a duty to establish a fact by a preponderance of the evidence, or evidence more convincing, by even the smallest degree, than the evidence presented by the other party. *Se-Ling Hosiery v. Margulies*, 70 A.2d 854 (Pa. 1950).
4. The offense must be a violation of the Public Utility Code, the Commission's regulations, or an order of the Commission. 66 Pa.C.S. § 701.

5. Any decision of the Commission must be supported by substantial evidence. 2 Pa.C.S. § 704.

6. "Substantial evidence" is such relevant evidence that a reasonable mind might accept as adequate to support a conclusion. More is required than a mere trace of evidence or a suspicion of the existence of a fact sought to be established. *Norfolk & W. Ry. Co. v. Pa. Pub. Util. Comm'n*, 413 A.2d 1037 (Pa. 1980); *Erie Resistor Corp. v. Unemployment Comp. Bd. of Rev.*, 166 A.2d 96 (Pa. Super. 1961); *Murphy v. Dept. of Pub. Welfare, White Haven Ctr.*, 480 A.2d 382 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1984).

7. The "name game" is a form of abuse of the administrative system where a member of a family steps in when a bill gets too high and takes over the utility account, thereby unlawfully relieving the family of the payment of the first bill, and then starts afresh. *Navarro v. PECO Energy Co.*, Docket No. F-2017-2610789 (Final Order entered March 27, 2018); *Manu v. Phila. Gas Works*, Docket No. F-2010-2191737 (Final Order entered July 24, 2012); *see also Molyneaux v. PPL Elec. Util. Corp.*, Docket No. F-01117535 (Opinion and Order entered Jan. 19, 2005).

8. A public utility has the right to bill and receive payment for the utility service it provides to its customers. 66 Pa.C.S. § 1303, *Neal v. Phila. Gas Works*, Docket No. Z-00871874 (Final Order entered Jan. 4, 2002); *Angie's Bar v. Duquesne Light Co.*, 72 Pa.P.U.C. 213 (1990).

9. Complainant failed to satisfy her burden of proof to demonstrate that her PPL bills included incorrect charges, or that PPL violated the Public Utility Code, the Commission's regulations, or an order of the Commission. 66 Pa.C.S. § 332(a).

ORDER

THEREFORE,

IT IS ORDERED:

1. That the Formal Complaint filed by Stephanie Martzen at Stephanie Martzen v. PPL Electric Utilities Corporation, Docket Number C-2025-3057001, is denied.
2. That the Secretary's Bureau shall mark this case as closed.

Dated: April 22, 2026

/s/
John M. Coogan
Administrative Law Judge