

PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17105-3265

Pennsylvania Public Utility
Commission, Law Bureau Prosecutory
Staff v. Peoples Natural Gas
Company, LLC f/k/a Dominion
Peoples Natural Gas Company

Public Meeting – November 19, 2010
2147821-OSA
Docket No. M-2010-2147821

STATEMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN TYRONE J. CHRISTY

I consistently have advocated that, in lieu of imposing civil penalties on utilities involving violations, or alleged violations, of the Public Utility Code or the Commission's Regulations, the greater public good would be served by applying these dollar amounts elsewhere. These monies should be directed toward deserving utility-related low income programs.

During my tenure at the Commission, we have approved and directed over \$4.5 million to various low-income universal service programs, including Hardship Funds, Low Income Usage Reduction Programs, Customer Assistance Programs, and the Dollar Energy Fund. The source of these funds has included civil penalties from jurisdictional utilities, as well as refunds to jurisdictional natural gas distribution utilities from interstate pipelines. Assuming an average contribution to customers of \$300, these past Commission actions have provided assistance to approximately 15,000 low-income households, have minimized customer hardship by making customer bills more affordable and have helped customers maintain essential utility service. Unfortunately, during this same time frame, \$261,500 in penalties has been paid to the General Fund. Had this money been directed to low-income universal service programs instead of the General Fund, over 870 additional need households could have received assistance.

Today, the Commission is seeking comments from interested parties regarding the Settlement Agreement (Settlement) filed on September 2, 2010, by Peoples Natural Gas Company, LLC f/k/a Dominion Peoples Natural Gas Company (Peoples) and the Commission's Law Bureau Prosecutory Staff. The investigation involves a possible violation of the provisions of Chapter 56 during post-termination contacts with the occupants of a household. The Settlement, among other things, provides for the imposition of a civil penalty of \$1,500¹.

I invite interested parties that submit comments on this Settlement to address the appropriateness of directing \$1,500 to Peoples' Hardship Fund in lieu of imposing a \$1,500 civil penalty. Although the amount of the penalty is small, I believe that providing additional assistance to low-income customers is an important consideration, particularly during these tough economic times in which many individuals are being forced to choose between paying for utility service and paying for other essentials for their families.

11-19-10

DATE



TYRONE J. CHRISTY, VICE CHAIRMAN

¹ In addition, Peoples will provide ongoing training to its customer representatives to ensure that the situation, which gave rise to this proceeding, occur again.