BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF OHIO

In the Matter of the Application of Suburban)	
Natural Gas Company for Approval of an)	Case No. 17-594-GA-ALT
Alternative Form of Regulation to Initiate a)	
Revenue Decoupling Mechanism.)	

INTERLOCUTORY APPEAL, REQUEST FOR CERTIFICATION TO FULL COMMISSION AND APPLICATION FOR REVIEW BY THE OFFICE OF THE OHIO CONSUMERS' COUNSEL

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BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF OHIO

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INTERLOCUTORY APPEAL, REQUEST FOR CERTIFICATION TO FULL COMMISSION AND APPLICATION FOR REVIEW BY THE OFFICE OF THE OHIO CONSUMERS' COUNSEL

This case involves Suburban Natural Gas Company's ("Suburban" or "Utility") request to drastically increase the monthly customer charge that residential customers pay for gas service from \$9.18 to \$29.81. The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel ("OCC") is the statutory representative of Suburban's 15,325 residential consumers, who pay these gas prices, including the monthly customer charges. In order to protect the interests of Suburban's residential consumers, OCC files this Interlocutory Appeal to the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio ("PUCO" or "Commission"). OCC respectfully requests that the PUCO grant the appeal or, in the alternative, certify the appeal to the full Commission for review of the Attorney Examiner's Entry of July 26, 2017 ("July 26 Entry"). The July 26 Entry established an unreasonable, unlawful, and abbreviated

¹ In the Matter of the Application of Suburban Natural Gas Company for Approval of an Alternative Form of Regulation to Initiate a Revenue Decoupling Mechanism, Case No. 17-594-GA-ALT, Application at 10 (April 25, 2017) ("Application").

² See R.C. Chapter 4911.

³ The appeal is filed pursuant to Ohio Admin. Code 4901-1-15.

timeframe for filing objections to the Staff Report and Suburban's Application ("Application").⁴

This appeal seeks to ensure that the amount of time afforded to respond to the Staff Report and Application in this proceeding is reasonable, lawful, and consistent with the PUCO's rules. The Interlocutory Appeal should be granted⁵ or certified⁶ for an immediate determination by the PUCO because the Entry represents both a departure from past precedent and a new or novel question of interpretation, law, or policy. Additionally, an immediate determination by the PUCO is needed to prevent the likelihood of undue prejudice to Suburban's residential consumers and other intervenors.

Upon review,⁷ the PUCO should modify the Entry establishing the procedural schedule. Specifically, the PUCO should allow parties a full thirty (30) days after the Staff Report is filed to objections to the Staff Report. Allowing 30 days for parties to respond to the Staff Report and the Application is required under Ohio law, and PUCO rules, policy, and precedent. Further, shortening this period to 16 days places an undue burden on intervenors because it unreasonably limits the amount of time intervenors will have to conduct a review of the Staff Report of Investigation and Application.

The reasons for this Interlocutory Appeal, including the Request for Certification and the Application for Review, are more fully explained in the attached Memorandum in Support.

⁴ In the Matter of the Application of Suburban Natural Gas Company for Approval of an Alternative Form of Regulation to Initiate a Revenue Decoupling Mechanism, Entry (July 26, 2017) ("July 26 Entry") (Attachment A).

⁵ Ohio Admin. Code 4901-1-15(A)(2).

⁶ Ohio Admin. Code 4901-1-15(B).

⁷ Ohio Admin. Code 4901-1-15(C).

Respectfully Submitted,

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MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT

I. BACKGROUND

On April 25, 2017, as supplemented on May 15, 2017, Suburban filed its Application for an alternative rate plan to begin using a straight fixed variable rate design to charge residential customers for base distribution rates, under Ohio Rev. Code 4929.05, 4929.051, and 4909.18.

On May 23, 2017, the attorney examiner issued an Entry that established a procedural schedule ("May 23 Entry"). The procedural schedule set June 6, 2017, as the filing deadline for any motions to intervene; July 31, 2017, as the filing deadline for the Staff Report; and August 31, 2017, as the filing deadline for objections to the Staff Report or to Suburban's application. Notably, the May 23 Entry provided 30 days in between the issuance of the Staff Report and Objections to the Staff Report and Application. On June 21, 2017, the attorney examiner issued an Entry granting the motion to intervene filed by the OCC on May 11, 2017.

On July 25, 2017, Staff filed a motion for extension of time for the filing of the Staff Report of Investigation ("Staff Motion"). The Staff Motion requested that the PUCO issue an entry allowing Staff an additional 30 days, or until August 30, 2017, to file its Staff Report. The Staff Motion did not request that the PUCO shorten the 30- day

time period allowed for objections to the Staff Report or to the Application. OCC notified Staff that it did not object to the Staff Motion.

On July 26, 2017, the attorney examiner issued an Entry, which granted the request in Staff's Motion to extend the deadline for filing the Staff Report. ("July 26 Entry") (Attachment A). However, the July 26 Entry also shortened the amount of time in-between the Staff Report's filing date and the deadline for objections to the Staff Report to sixteen days. Specifically, the procedural schedule set August 30, 2017, as the filing deadline for the Staff Report and September 15, 2017, as the filing deadline for objections to the Staff Report or to the Application. This sua sponte amendment and reduction of the amount of time to review and file objections to the Staff Report and Application is not reasonable or lawful. OCC's appeal should be granted or certified to the PUCO and the July 26 Entry should be reversed or amended.

II. STANDARD OF REVIEW

A. A party make take an immediate interlocutory appeal to the Commission from any ruling if the ruling terminates a party's right to participate in the proceeding.

Under Ohio Adm. Code 4901-1-15(A), there are certain circumstances adversely affecting a party that allow the party to take an interlocutory appeal to the Commission without the need for the appeal to be certified to the Commission by the Attorney Examiner. Appeals can be taken without certification when an Attorney Examiner has terminated a party's right to participate in a proceeding.⁸ Because the July 26 Entry will terminate OCC's right to serve discovery on issues raised in the Staff Report, OCC has the right to take this direct interlocutory appeal to the Commission.

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⁸ See Ohio Admin. Code 4901-1-15(A)(2).

B. Alternatively, the Interlocutory Appeal should be certified to the Commission because it presents both a new or novel question of interpretation, law, or policy, and is taken from a ruling which represents a departure from past precedent.

If a party does not satisfy the criteria set forth in Ohio Adm. Code 4901-1-15(A), the PUCO's procedural rules require an interlocutory appeal to be certified by the Commission. The standard applicable to certifying this appeal is "that the appeal presents a new or novel question of interpretation, law, or policy, or is taken from a ruling which represents a departure from past precedent and an immediate determination by the commission is needed to prevent the likelihood of undue prejudice ... to one or more of the parties, should the commission ultimately reverse the ruling in question." 9

As explained more fully below, while Ohio Adm. Code 4901-1-15(A)(2) applies in the instant circumstance and OCC's interlocutory appeal does not need to be certified, OCC's interlocutory appeal also qualifies for certification under the PUCO's rules. Upon consideration of an appeal, the PUCO may affirm, reverse, or modify the ruling or dismiss the appeal. OCC urges the PUCO to reverse the attorney examiner's ruling contained in the July 26 Entry.

III. ARGUMENT

A. The attorney examiner's ruling terminates OCC's right to participate fully and effectively for Ohioans in this proceeding.

The July 26 Entry limits the amount of time intervenors have to file objections to the Staff Report to just 16 days. This ruling will limit the scope of participation of all intervenor's and, thus, limits the scope of the proceeding. Specifically, with the current 20-day time frame for discovery responses OCC would essentially be prohibited from

⁹ Ohio Admin. Code 4901-1-15(B).

¹⁰ Ohio Adm. Code 4901-1-15(E).

serving follow-up discovery on issues the Staff may have uncovered in its Staff Report. Because objections to the Staff Report frame the issues in the proceeding, ¹¹ it is vital that parties be allowed to fully and effectively analyze the Staff Report. A vital tool for analyzing any staff report is to follow up on issues by serving discovery requests. The discovery process will aid the OCC, and other parties, in the preparation of their objections and, ultimately, better inform the PUCO's review of the Staff Report and Application. Here, the July 26 Entry terminates OCC's ability to serve discovery and, therefore, to fully and effectively participate in the proceeding. This prevents OCC from representing the interests of Suburban's residential customers in this proceeding. An immediate decision by the Commission is needed to allow OCC to fully participate in this proceeding, consistent with the full powers and rights granted to intervening parties under Ohio rule and law.¹²

B. The July 26 Entry represents a departure from past precedent and presents a new or novel question of interpretation, law, or policy that will harm consumers.

The July 26 Entry represents a departure from past precedent and presents a new or novel question of interpretation, law, or policy. Ohio law, PUCO rules, PUCO policy, and past PUCO precedent all support the position that intervenors be afforded 30 calendar days to file objections to a staff report of investigation in an alternative rate proceeding, if not any proceeding involving a request for an increase in rates.

¹¹ See Ohio Admin. Code 4901-1-28(C).

¹² See R.C. 4903.221; Ohio Adm. Code 4901-1-11.

Ohio Admin. Code 4901:1-19-07(F)(1)(a), ¹³ Ohio Admin. Code 4901-1-28(B), ¹⁴ and R.C. 4909.19¹⁵ all state that objections to a Staff Report on an application for an increase in rates must be filed with the PUCO within 30 calendar days after the filing of a staff report of investigation. Specifically, Suburban filed an alternative rate application filed under R.C. 4929.05. ¹⁶ Such an application is required under R.C. 4909.18. ¹⁷ Upon the filing of the alternative rate application, R.C. 4909.19 requires a PUCO investigation, followed by issuance of a staff report and objections to the staff report filed within 30 days. ¹⁸

Accordingly, the PUCO has consistently ordered that the deadline for filing objections to a staff report be 30 days from when the Staff issues its staff report.¹⁹ Indeed,

¹³ See Ohio Admin. Code 4901:1-19-07(F)(1)(a) ("Objections must be filed with the commission and served on all parties within **thirty calendar days** after the filing of the report." (emphasis added) (formatting omitted)).

¹⁴ See Ohio Admin. Code 4901-1-28(B) ("Any party may file objections to a report of investigation described in paragraph (A) of this rule, within **thirty days** after such report is filed with the commission.") (emphasis added).

¹⁵ R.C. 4909.19 ("If objections are filed with the commission within **thirty days** after the filing of such report...") (emphasis added).

¹⁶ See R.C. 4929.05.

¹⁷ See R.C. 4909.18.

¹⁸ See R.C. 4909.19.

¹⁹ See e.g., In the Matter of the Application of Suburban Natural Gas Company for Approval of an Alternative Form of Regulation to Initiate a Revenue Decoupling Mechanism, Case No. 17-594-GA-ALT, Entry (May 23, 2017); In the Matter of the Application of Columbia Gas of Ohio, Inc. for Approval of an Alternative Form of Regulation to Extend and Increase its Infrastructure Replacement Program, Case No. 16-2422-GA-ALT, Entry at 2 (April 6, 2017); In the Matter of the Application of Duke Energy Ohio, Inc., for Approval of an Alternative Rate Plan Pursuant to R.C. 4929.05 for an Accelerated Service Line Replacement Program, Case No. 14-1622-GA-ALT, Entry at 1-2 (April 14, 2015); In the Matter of the Application of Duke Energy Ohio, Inc., for an Increase in its Electric Distribution Rates, Case No. 12-1682-EL-AIR, et al. Entry at 2 (January 10, 2013) ("Pursuant to Section 4909.19, Revised Code, and Rule 4901- 1-28(B), Ohio Administrative Code (O.A.C.), all objections to the staff reports must be filed within 30 days after the filing of such reports, and all objections must be specific." (emphasis added)); In the Matter of the Application of Pike Natural Gas Company for Approval of an Alternative Rate Plan Proposing a Revenue Decoupling Mechanism, Case No. 08-941-GA-ALT, Entry at 1-2 (June 16, 2009); In the Matter of the Application of Eastern Natural Gas Company for Approval of an Alternative Rate Plan Proposing a Revenue Decoupling Mechanism, Case No. 08-940-GA-ALT, Entry at 1-2 (June 16, 2009); In the Matter of the Application of The East Ohio Gas Company d/b/a Dominion East Ohio for Approval of an Alternative Form of Regulation to Extend and Increase its Pipeline Infrastructure Replacement Program, Case No. 15-362-GA-ALT, Entry at 2 (June 23, 2015).

the PUCO followed this very law, rule, and policy in its first procedural schedule in this case.²⁰ By not allowing for a 30-day review period after the Staff Report is filed, the attorney examiner's July 26 Entry represents a departure from past precedent.

The July 26 Entry also presents a new or novel question of interpretation, law, or policy because, to OCC's knowledge, the PUCO has never shortened the statutory 30-day period for filing objections to a staff report in a natural gas alternative rate regulation proceeding before. Indeed, the PUCO has consistently followed the Ohio Revised Code's and Ohio Administrative Code's requirement that the period in question be 30 days—not sixteen. Therefore, the attorney examiner's ruling in the July 26 Entry is a novel question of interpretation, law, or policy.

C. An immediate determination is needed to prevent the occurrence of undue prejudice to consumers.

Given that the Staff Report is currently set to be filed 35 days from the filing of this interlocutory appeal, an immediate determination is needed to prevent undue prejudice to the OCC in the event the Commission ultimately reverses the ruling in question. The time for filing objections (now set at September 15, 2017) could come and go without a ruling, forcing OCC to comply with the Attorney Examiner's Entry.

If the attorney examiner's Entry is not reversed or modified, then OCC's time to respond to the Staff Report will be reduced to 16 days (12 business days). This is half the time that the law (R.C. 4909.19) and rules (Ohio Admin. Code 4901-1-28 and Ohio Admin. Code 4901:1-19-07(F)(1)(a)) require. Reducing the amount of time intervenors are afforded to file their objections in this proceeding will unduly prejudice OCC. In just 16 days, OCC will be pressed to diligently review the Staff Report's findings and

²⁰ See May 23 Entry.

²¹ See Supra note 19.

recommendations, discuss the issues with any expert consultants, serve the necessary discovery, review the discovery responses, discuss and formulate positions, and draft and file objections. Indeed, with the 20-day time frame for discovery responses OCC would essentially be prohibited from serving follow-up discovery on issues the Staff may have uncovered in its Staff Report. In short, a 16-day deadline for filing objections to the Staff Report will make it very difficult for the OCC to effectively represent Suburban's residential consumers.

In addition, the July 26 Entry will unduly prejudice OCC because it may restrict the scope of the proceedings. Under Ohio Admin. Code 4901-1-28(C), the objections to a staff report "shall frame the issues in the proceeding." Consequently, pressing intervenors to analyze and file objections to the Staff Report under a contracted schedule could result in relevant issues being left out of their respected objections. This is especially true given the July 26 Entry's effective prohibition on serving discovery on the Staff Report. Therefore, the July 26 Entry will prejudice parties because it could result in relevant issues in the Application being left unresolved and the proceeding incomplete.

The prejudice that will result from the July 26 Entry is an issue that must be remedied now – not at a future date. If the attorney examiner declines to certify OCC's interlocutory appeal then OCC is allowed by law to attempt to raise the issue in its initial post-hearing brief.²³ However, at that time, there would be no remedy for the harm and prejudice that OCC will have experienced. The PUCO will not be able to give OCC back the 14 days it will lose to review the Staff Report and Application if the July 26 Entry is

²² Ohio Admin. Code 4901-1-28(C).

²³ Ohio Admin. Code 4901-1-15(F).

not reversed or amended. It will be too late. At that point, the proceeding will have crossed the Rubicon River and the die, as they say, will have been cast.

Thus, that element for certification of the Interlocutory Appeal is also met.²⁴

IV. APPLICATION FOR REVIEW

OCC's Application for Review meets the requirements of Ohio Admin. Code 4901-1-15(C), because the application has been filed "within five days after the ruling is issued" and the application does "set forth the basis of the appeal and citations of any authorities relied upon." The PUCO should reverse or modify the Entry, pursuant to Ohio Admin. Code 4901-1-15(E).

It is standard procedure for parties to be given 30 days in which to file objections to a staff report. The reason it is standard procedure is because Ohio law and PUCO rules require it. According to Ohio Admin. Code 4901:1-19-07(F)(1)(a),²⁵ Ohio Admin. Code 4901-1-28(B),²⁶ R.C. 4909.19,²⁷ and PUCO precedent,²⁸ objections to a Staff Report on an alternative rate application must be filed with the PUCO within 30 calendar days after the filing of a staff report of investigation. An alternative rate plan under R.C. 4929.05 requires an application under R.C. 4909.18. Under R.C. 4909.19, any application under R.C. 4909.18 requires a PUCO investigation and a subsequent staff report. Finally, R.C. 4909.19 states that any objections to the staff report must filed within 30 days. Thus, any time period other than 30 days for parties to file objections to a staff report would be both

²⁴ Ohio Admin. Code 4901-1-15(B).

²⁵ See Supra note 13.

²⁶ See Supra note 14.

²⁷ See Supra note 15.

²⁸ See Supra note 19.

a departure from past precedent and presents a new or novel question of interpretation, law, or policy.

Moreover, the ruling in the July 26 Entry will unduly prejudice OCC and any other intervenor. Suburban's residential consumers will be harmed and prejudiced if the July 26 Entry is not reversed or modified because it will be extremely difficult for OCC to assess the Staff Report and Suburban's Application during the shorter period of time. OCC will likely not have sufficient time to completely analyze the Staff Report and provide substantive objections to it on behalf of Ohio consumers. In addition, having a more complete record before it will assist the PUCO in making an informed decision.

An immediate reversal of the attorney examiner's Entry is warranted because OCC's harm can only be remedied now, not later. If the July 26 Entry is allowed to stand – and OCC is only allowed 16 days to review and file objections to the Staff Report – a remedy for OCC will not be possible. It will not be possible later to give OCC back the time that it needs now to review the Staff Report and zealously represent its client, Suburban's residential consumers.

In addition, the July 26 Entry could unreasonably restrict the scope of the proceeding. Under, Ohio Admin. Code 4901-1-28(C), objections to a staff report "shall frame the issues in the proceeding." Therefore, shortening the 30-day time period could restrict the scope of the proceeding because relevant issues in the Application and Staff Report could accidentally be omitted from intervenor's objections. Such a result leaves the PUCO without the information or evidence it needs to completely rule on Suburban's Application and unduly prejudice intervenors.

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²⁹ Ohio Admin. Code 4901-1-28(C).

Furthermore, the ruling in the July 26 Entry will only serve to inflict rather than prevent harm. Indeed, there is no legitimate reason to shorten the 30-day time period for filing objections to the Staff Report to sixteen days. The Staff Motion did not provide one. Nor did the July 26 Entry. Further, the fact that the Staff Motion was unopposed proves there is no need to accelerate the proceeding. That is, if there was a reason to set the proceeding on an accelerated schedule, then Staff's Motion to extend the deadline for filing the Staff Report should not have been approved.

Consistent with Ohio Adm. Code 4901-1-15(E)(1), the Commission should modify or reverse the July 26 Entry, and require that parties be given 30 calendar days in which to file objections to the Staff Report and Suburban's Application.

V. CONCLUSION

For the reasons set forth above, this Appeal should be granted or certified to the full Commission and the Commission should reverse or modify the Attorney Examiner's ruling. The PUCO should allow parties 30 days after the filing of the Staff Report to file objections to the Staff Report or Suburban's Application. This is standard PUCO practice, is required by Ohio, PUCO rules, and PUCO precedent, and is in the public interest. Without a reversal of the July 26 Entry, OCC will suffer irreparable undue prejudice.

Respectfully Submitted,

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that a copy of this Interlocutory Appeal was served by electronic service to the counsel identified below (provided electronically to the Attorney Examiners) this 31st day of July, 2017.

/s/ Kevin F. Moore
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THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF OHIO

IN THE MATTER OF THE APPLICATION OF SUBURBAN NATURAL GAS COMPANY FOR APPROVAL OF AN ALTERNATIVE FORM OF REGULATION TO INITIATE A REVENUE DECOUPLING MECHANISM.

CASE NO. 17-594-GA-ALT

ENTRY

Entered in the Journal on July 26, 2017

- {¶ 1} Suburban Natural Gas Company (Suburban) is a natural gas company and public utility as defined in R.C. 4905.03 and R.C. 4905.02, respectively. As such, Suburban is subject to the jurisdiction of the Commission.
- {¶ 2} On April 25, 2017, as supplemented on May 15, 2017, Suburban filed an application for approval of an alternative rate plan with supporting exhibits and testimony pursuant to R.C. 4929.05, 4929.051, and 4909.18. In its application, Suburban seeks to initiate a revenue decoupling mechanism that provides for a Straight Fixed Variable rate design to be phased in over a two-year period. Citing R.C. 4929.051(A), Suburban additionally requests approval of an Energy Efficiency Program (EEP) pilot and the establishment of a corresponding EEP Rider with the initial rate set at zero. Suburban suggests designing the EEP Rider in collaboration with Staff and other interested parties and submitting the same for Commission approval within four months after approval of the instant application.
- {¶ 3} On May 19, 2017, Staff filed a letter indicating that Suburban's supplemented application is in compliance with Ohio Adm.Code 4901:1-19-06.
- {¶ 4} By Entry issued May 23, 2017, the attorney examiner established the procedural schedule that set June 6, 2017, as the filing deadline for any motions to intervene; July 31, 2017, as the filing deadline for the Staff Report; and August 31, 2017, as the filing deadline for objections to the Staff Report or to Suburban's application.

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{¶ 5} By Entry issued June 21, 2017, the attorney examiner granted a motion to intervene filed by Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) on May 11, 2017.

- {¶ 6} On July 25, 2017, Staff filed a motion for extension of time for the filing of the Staff Report of Investigation. Staff represents that, due to the press of business, it does not expect to meet the given deadline and requests that Staff be permitted an additional 30 days, or until August 30, 2017, to file its Report. Staff further requests expedited consideration of its motion; Staff represents that neither Suburban nor OCC objects to the requested extension or to the request for expedited consideration.
- {¶ 7} The attorney examiner finds that Staff's motion for an extension is reasonable and should be granted. The attorney examiner further finds that the deadline for filing objections to the Staff Report or to Suburban's application should also be extended. Accordingly, the attorney examiner finds that the procedural schedule should be extended as follows:
 - (a) August 30, 2017 Deadline for the filing of the Staff Report.
 - (b) September 15, 2017 Deadline for the filing of objections to the Staff Report or objections to the application.
- {¶ 8} As previously noted, after the Commission considers the objections filed, if any, the Commission will determine whether a hearing on Suburban's alternative rate plan application to initiate a revenue decoupling mechanism is necessary.
 - $\{\P 9\}$ It is, therefore,
- {¶ 10} ORDERED, That Staff's motion for an extension of time to file the Staff Report be granted. It is, further,
- {¶ 11} ORDERED, That the procedural schedule as revised and set forth in Paragraph 7 be observed. It is, further,

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 \P 12) ORDERED, That a copy of this Entry be served upon all parties and interested persons of record.

THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF OHIO

s/Patricia Schabo

By: Patricia A. Schabo Attorney Examiner

SJP/sc

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in

Case No(s). 17-0594-GA-ALT

Summary: Attorney Examiner Entry granting Staff's motion for an extension of time to file the Staff Report and setting forth the revised procedural schedule indicated in Paragraph 7. - electronically filed by Sandra Coffey on behalf of Patricia Schabo, Attorney Examiner, Public Utilities Commission of Ohio

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in

Case No(s). 17-0594-GA-ALT

Summary: Request Interlocutory Appeal, Request for Certification to Full Commission and Application for Review by The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel electronically filed by Ms. Jamie Williams on behalf of Moore, Kevin F. Mr.