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1 APPEARANCES

2 ON BEHALF OF COLUMBIA GAS OF OHIO:

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8

9 ON BEHALF OF COLUMBIA'S RESIDENTIAL UTILITY CONSUMERS:

10 WILLIAM MICHAEL, ESQUIRE

11 Ohio Consumers' Counsel

12 65 East State Street, 7th Floor

13 Columbus, Ohio 43215-3420

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15

16 ALSO PRESENT:

17 M. Beth Trumbold, Commissioner

18 Christopher, Ms. Brown's Support

19 Desmond Bryant, Vice President of Government

20 Relations, Columbus Chamber of Commerce

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1	2 NO.	3 EXHIBITS	4 DESCRIPTION	5 ID/EVD
6	7	8	9 (None marked.)	10
11	12	13		14
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19	20	21		22
23	24	25		26

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1 INDEX

2 WITNESS(ES): DX CX RDX RCX

3 DON MASON

4 KELLIE BROWN

5 DAWN GREULICH

6 MEG DEEDRICK

7 BRENDA ZIENTA

8 JEFFREY DAVIS

9 DON DEPERRO

10 By Mr. Michael 30

11 CHRIS STEELE

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1 PROCEEDINGS

2 THE REPORTER: Good evening. My name

3 is Nic Joseph Saul; I am the reporter assigned by

4 Veritext to take the record of this proceeding. We

5 are now on the record at 6:00 p.m. on June 15, 2022,

6 in the -- in the council chambers at 401 Market

7 Street, Zanesville, Ohio 47 -- sorry -- 43701.

8 Go ahead.

9 THE COURT: Thank you. Good evening.

10 The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio is called for

11 a hearing at this time and this place, Case Number

12 21-637-GA-AIR, being In the Matter of the Application

13 of Columbia Gas of Ohio, Inc., for authority to

14 increase rates and related matters.

15 My name is Gregory Price. I am the

16 administrative law judge assigned to preside over

17 tonight's hearing. With me is Commissioner

18 Beth Trumbold. I -- Ms. Trumbold to welcome remarks.

19 THE COMMISSIONER: Oh, okay. Yeah.

20 Perfect.

21 I'm going to be brief, but my name's

22 Beth Trumbold. I'm one of the five commissioners that

23 are going to make a final decision in this case. This

24 is one part of the process, so we like to go out to

25 the community affected by the rate case and hear what

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1 they have to say, and that becomes part of the record,
 2 and we use that in making our final decision. I also
 3 want to thank former Commissioner Don Mason, now
 4 Mayor Mason, here for welcoming us to the great town
 5 of Zanesville. And incidentally, I actually have his
 6 old office and oftentimes get his phone calls after
 7 ten years have passed or more.

8 So, Mayor Mason, thank you so much for
 9 having us tonight.

10 THE MAYOR: Thank you.

11 THE COURT: I'd also like to note that
 12 our commission staff members are in the back and out
 13 in the hall in case you need any assistance regarding
 14 information in this case, how to download a staff
 15 report, copy of the fact sheet, or anything else.
 16 They'd be more than happy to help you.

17 We'll go ahead and take appearances,
 18 starting with the company.

19 MR. RYAN: Your Honor, on behalf of the
 20 applicant Columbia Gas of Ohio, John Ryan, 290 West
 21 Nationwide Boulevard, Columbus, Ohio 43215. Thank
 22 you.

23 THE COURT: Consumers' Counsel.

24 MR. MICHAEL: Good evening, Your Honor,
 25 Commissioner Trumbold. On behalf of Columbia's

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1 residential utility consumers, Bill Michael with the
 2 office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel.

3 THE COURT: Thank you.

4 I'd just like to note that the subject
 5 of today's hearing is the application filed by
 6 Columbia on June 30, 2021, for approval to increase
 7 rates and for approval of alternative rate plan. The
 8 commission staff filed report of investigation of the
 9 application on April 6, 2022. This staff report can
 10 be downloaded from the commission's website, and the
 11 instructions are on the fact sheet that the staff has
 12 prepared. I'd like to note that the staff report is a
 13 recommendation only and does not necessarily reflect
 14 the final determinations in that case, which will be
 15 made by the commissioners after the evidentiary
 16 hearing.

17 As Commissioner Trumbold noted, the
 18 purpose of tonight's hearing is to receive testimony
 19 from the public who will be affected by the proposed
 20 rates, so this public hearing is your opportunity to
 21 let the commissioners know what you think about the
 22 application. Tonight's public hearing is only one
 23 aspect of the process in this case. We've had four
 24 other public hearings. This is the final one for this
 25 case. And an evidentiary hearing is scheduled to

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1 commence on July 13, 2022, at the offices of the
 2 commission.

3 Tonight's hearing is being transcribed
 4 by our court reporter. If you plan to testify, please
 5 speak clearly so the court reporter can reflect your
 6 comments on the record. If you prepared a written
 7 statement, if you could provide a copy to the court
 8 reporter so that she can make sure she gets all of
 9 your thoughts down properly.

10 Each person who signed up on the
 11 sign-in list may present sworn testimony. I will
 12 swear in each witness and ask you to state your name
 13 and address for the record. If anybody has not had a
 14 chance to sign up, at the end we'll go ahead and take
 15 volunteers or people who have not previously signed
 16 up.

17 I will note that the parties to the
 18 case, Consumers' Counsel and Columbia Gas, are
 19 permitted to ask you questions regarding your
 20 testimony. The chair and the commissioners will judge
 21 the merits of this application. Neither the
 22 Commissioner Trumbold nor I can answer questions
 23 regarding the application. That's why we have this
 24 fact sheet, which has a summary of the application and
 25 the staff's recommendations.

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1 Once again, I'd like to note this is
 2 your opportunity to let the commissioners know what
 3 you think about the application. The testimony you
 4 provide will be part of the official record in this
 5 case and will be reviewed by the commissioners before
 6 they make a decision. If you decide you do not wish
 7 to testify when your name is called, please go ahead
 8 and just pass to the next witness. If you decide that
 9 you prefer to file written comments with the
 10 commission, the fact sheet gives instructions on how
 11 to do that as well. We don't have a very large crowd
 12 tonight, but we would appreciate it if each witness
 13 could try to limit themselves to roughly five minutes
 14 per witness.

15 With that, go ahead and take our first
 16 witness.

17 THE COMMISSIONER: Okay. Yeah. So,
 18 Mayor Don Mason, do you want to come forward?
 19 WHEREUPON,
 20 DON MASON,
 21 called as a witness, and having been first duly sworn
 22 to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but
 23 the truth, was examined and testified as follows:
 24 THE COURT: Please state your name,
 25 business address for the record.

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1 THE WITNESS-1: Don L. Mason, Mayor of
 2 Zanesville, Ohio, 401 Market Street, Zanesville, Ohio
 3 43701.
 4 THE COURT: Please proceed.
 5 THE WITNESS-1: Good day to the Public
 6 Utilities Commission, and thank you for coming to
 7 Zanesville, Ohio, for the hearing with Columbia Gas of
 8 Ohio. I started following energy markets when I was
 9 in high school and my father was an AEP United Mine
 10 worker. My passion for energy led me, as mayor in the
 11 1980s, to negotiate separate rate cases with Columbia
 12 Gas of Ohio and subsequently be part of the first
 13 statewide rates rolled out in the 1980s. As you are
 14 aware, I was subsequently chief of oil and gas for
 15 Ohio prior to being a public utilities commissioner.
 16 We appreciate Columbia Gas as an
 17 employer and local business. The city is working with
 18 them and attempting to coordinate the main line
 19 replacements in our community. The difficulty is that
 20 ODOT has decided for a five or six-year period that
 21 I-70 will be under construction. That means primary
 22 and secondary routes are being re-routed in order to
 23 accommodate bridge replacement and similar projects.
 24 With that being stated, we are working to keep
 25 Columbia Ohio -- Columbia Gas of Ohio contractors out

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1 of our main roads as much as possible during periods
 2 that roads are affected by ODOT and their contractors.
 3 Columbia's propose -- proposed 212
 4 million-dollar rate increase is far too high for
 5 consumers, especially with so many still hurting from
 6 the effects of the pandemic. I read the Ohio
 7 Consumers' Counsel's remarks and recommendations, and
 8 it's \$10,000,000 is what they were looking at.
 9 Please bear in mind that the statewide
 10 rates that the big cities of Columbus and Cleveland
 11 are doing better economically than in Southeast Ohio.
 12 Median income in Zanesville is 30,345 while -- while
 13 Ohio is 58,642. Statewide poverty rate is 13.1
 14 percent, but poverty rate in Zanesville is 30.1
 15 percent. Households under 65 with a disability in
 16 Zanesville are 15.4 percent. Per capita income in
 17 Zanesville is \$19,073. So Southeast Ohio and
 18 Zanesville are less able to afford the proposed or
 19 suggested rate increases than those in the major
 20 cities.
 21 The proposal to increase monthly
 22 rate -- fixed rates for our residential consumers is
 23 way too high. It appears that either -- either
 24 tripling or quadrupling the rates if you look at the
 25 numbers as they play down the system. Also, the high

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1 fixed rates that the -- would result -- deny consumers
 2 the ability to lower their gas bills by reducing
 3 usage. Further, high monthly fixed charge to have a
 4 disproportionate impact and adverse impact on
 5 low-income and residential consumers. Customers need
 6 to be encouraged to use energy efficiency, but high
 7 fixed monthly rate does not send that message.
 8 I support OCC's proposal for a
 9 10 million-dollar bill payment assistance program for
 10 low income and working poor consumers funded by
 11 Columbia shareholders rather than rate payers, but
 12 again, I urge emphasis on funding programs in
 13 Southeast Ohio.
 14 Additionally, I believe the PUCO needs
 15 to enhance the education related to the gas choice
 16 program so consumers can understand the basics of
 17 natural gas as a commodity. Consumers need additional
 18 education and information in order to understand
 19 energy. I question the broad request to allow cost
 20 related to the PHMSA Mega Rule to be automatically
 21 rolled into rates. It seems that a strict application
 22 of allowing all those cost is counter to all decisions
 23 to invest that are made on risk-based decision making.
 24 The three main parts of the Mega Rule,
 25 of course, are intensifying risk assessment and

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1 maximum level operating pressure requirements. To me,
 2 changing MAOP or M-A-O-P does not create a safer
 3 pipeline system when most damage is actually done by
 4 third-party contact. Expanding integrity management
 5 program regulations to gathering lines and other --
 6 other previously nonregulated lines is not good either
 7 because it doesn't directly affect Columbia Gas, but
 8 it does drive up the cost of natural gas. And again,
 9 that affects the consumers. Regulators need to
 10 continue to focus on urban and high-consequence areas
 11 rather than on rural systems, which is where gathering
 12 systems are. Increasing reporting requirements and
 13 safety regulations are also part of the Mega Rule, and
 14 quite frankly, I believe there's already enough
 15 paperwork reporting. Let's spend our time on working
 16 on the issues.
 17 So I believe that consumers, both
 18 business and residential, have been accustomed to low
 19 energy prices and did not realize they need to plan
 20 for the future. I was pleased that during the last
 21 several winters, such as 2016 and 2020, to see low
 22 natural gas price -- Appalachian natural gas prices
 23 sub \$2 in MCF price range even though New England and
 24 eastern states were paying two to three times as much.
 25 In fact, the Henry Hub for natural gas in 2020,

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1 between January and July, was well below \$2 in MCF,
 2 normally hovering -- hovering around a dollar seventy
 3 in MCF price range. However, in two -- in 2022, the
 4 prices have gradually increased from 4.38 to \$9 in
 5 MCF. As more natural gas generation -- excuse me --
 6 as more natural gas is being used for electricity
 7 generation, this trend may be something more of the
 8 norm rather than the exception. That is why we have
 9 seen June, July, and August price for natural gas rise
 10 to levels similar to the winter months. Natural gas
 11 transactions this time of the year and at -- are the
 12 high prices being posted, are likely be coming from
 13 electricity generation or commercial industrial usage
 14 rather than from winter storage.

15 So PUCO, Columbia Gas of Ohio, and --
 16 need to look at the growing trends which affect
 17 natural gas. Besides natural gas power generation
 18 providing more baseload, balancing, and peaking
 19 generation, which increase the demand for natural gas,
 20 we will see increased imports to Europe as natural gas
 21 becomes a long-term economic tool in the present
 22 Russian-Ukraine conflict. Exports of LNG should rise
 23 from 10.7 Bcf to about 12.7 Bcf, and exports to Mexico
 24 should also go from about 6.2 to about 6.7 Bcf.
 25 So let me go back to my main point.

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1 When natural gas was cheap, that was the time that the
 2 PUCO, the OCC, and Columbia Gas should've been
 3 encouraging consumers to have long fixed contracts for
 4 their natural gas, and that would've been provided
 5 through gas marketers. That could've been provided a
 6 savings for at least one year of price increases. Now
 7 that prices are high for the foreseeable future, I
 8 think additional education is needed to encourage
 9 variable rate contracts. I doubt that natural gas
 10 prices will continue to increase. The old adage is
 11 that the fix for high prices is high prices because
 12 ultimately increased supply will drive down the
 13 prices. So when prices drop, that should be the
 14 signal for -- for consumers -- once again looked into
 15 fixed offerings.

16 At the end of the day, the PUCO, the
 17 OCC, and Columbia of Ohio should all be helping
 18 consumers save money on their bottom line, and the
 19 vast majority of a natural gas bill is the cost passed
 20 along relative to natural gas supply. Again, I would
 21 like to thank the PUCO for having their hearing in
 22 Zanesville today and wish you well in your
 23 deliberation.

24 THE COURT: Thank you.
 25 Any questions for this witness,

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1 Consumers' Counsel?
 2 Okay. Thank you.
 3 Thank you for your time.
 4 THE COMMISSIONER: Okay. Our next
 5 witness is Kellie -- is it Braun or Brown?
 6 MS. BROWN: Brown.
 7 THE COMMISSIONER: Okay.
 8 MS. BROWN: With Muskingum and Guernsey
 9 DD.
 10 WHEREUPON,
 11 KELLIE BROWN,
 12 called as a witness, and having been first duly sworn
 13 to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but
 14 the truth, was examined and testified as follows:
 15 THE COURT: Please state your name and
 16 business address for the record.
 17 THE WITNESS-2: My name is
 18 Kellie Brown, and I serve in Guernsey County at 60770
 19 Southgate Road, Byesville, and here in Muskingum
 20 County at 1304 Newark Road, Zanesville. And I've
 21 brought Christopher as my support today.
 22 So first I would just like to thank you
 23 for hosting this meeting here and letting us express
 24 our concerns. So I am Kellie Brown, and I serve as a
 25 sheriff superintendent for the Guernsey and the

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1 Muskingum County Boards of Developmental Disabilities.
 2 On behalf of the boards, I would like to thank the
 3 members of the community for allowing me to speak.
 4 I am opposing this rate increase and
 5 negative impact that it will have on many individuals
 6 and families served by our boards. I am sure the
 7 committee knows the base social security income for
 8 many people we serve is \$841 per month. As I
 9 understand, the current fixed monthly distribution
 10 charge for Columbia Gas currently is \$16.75 to \$46.31,
 11 and Columbia Gas is proposing that in five years the
 12 fixed charges could be up to \$80 monthly. Currently
 13 in our region the cost of renting accessible and
 14 appropriate housing in safe neighborhoods is
 15 climbed -- climbing steeply. At this time it is
 16 not -- uncommon -- excuse me -- for the individuals we
 17 -- we support who rely solely on social security to be
 18 spending 50 percent or more of their income on rent
 19 alone, and we anticipate this problem to intensify as
 20 the region braces for the Intel Project.

21 Given the current state of the economy
 22 as families struggle with the financial impacts of the
 23 pandemic, the rising gasoline prices, increasing
 24 inflation, and the possibility that our country is
 25 going into recession, I find that the proposed rate

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1 increase is completely out of alignment with the needs
 2 of Ohioans and especially out of alignment for those
 3 people on a limited income.
 4 I thank you for allowing me to express
 5 my opposition to the rate increase, and I look forward
 6 to how you rule on the topic. Thank you.
 7 THE COURT: Thank you.
 8 Any questions for this witness?
 9 Thank you for your time.
 10 THE COMMISSIONER: The next witness is
 11 Dawn Greulich, Lexington Avenue.
 12 WHEREUPON,
 13 DAWN GREULICH,
 14 called as a witness, and having been first duly sworn
 15 to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but
 16 the truth, was examined and testified as follows:
 17 THE COURT: Please state your name and
 18 address for the record.
 19 THE WITNESS-3: Dawn Greulich, 804
 20 Lexington Avenue, Zanesville.
 21 THE COURT: Please proceed.
 22 THE WITNESS-3: They've already said a
 23 lot, but I'm coming at this from an actual resident of
 24 this area, and I know -- for me I'm one of the
 25 fortunate ones because my house payment is so low, but

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1 my gas this year -- my budget started at 144 and ended
 2 at 197. I can't even imagine if it goes up 27
 3 percent. Then there are those people that are like my
 4 neighbor who lives on 707 a month. I don't know how
 5 she would pay a gas bill like that and still survive.
 6 I'm one of those disabled households
 7 that the mayor talked about. My husband has been
 8 disabled for over 20 years, so I'm the only one
 9 working, and we have his disability. And I know there
 10 are so many in this county and in this general area of
 11 Ohio that are like that. And like I said, the others
 12 said so much of what I was going to say, so I'll just
 13 end there, and thank you.
 14 THE COURT: Thank you.
 15 Any questions for this witness?
 16 Thank you again.
 17 THE COMMISSIONER: Okay. Next we have
 18 -- is it Meg?
 19 MS. DEEDRICK: Yes.
 20 THE COMMISSIONER: Deedrick.
 21 MS. DEEDRICK: Yes, it is.
 22 //
 23 //
 24 //
 25 //

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1 WHEREUPON,
 2 MEG DEEDRICK,
 3 called as a witness, and having been first duly sworn
 4 to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but
 5 the truth, was examined and testified as follows:
 6 THE COURT: Please state your name and
 7 address for the record.
 8 THE WITNESS-4: My name is
 9 Meg Deedrick, and I'm the executive director of the
 10 United Way of Muskingum, Perry, and Morgan County --
 11 Counties. Our business address is 158 North 5th
 12 Street, Zanesville, Ohio 43701.
 13 THE COURT: Please proceed.
 14 THE WITNESS-4: Again, I appreciate the
 15 opportunity to comment on this process. I echo the
 16 sentiments that have been entered into the record
 17 already. I'd like to make two additional points this
 18 evening.
 19 One is, United Way fights for the
 20 health, education, and financial stability of every
 21 person in Muskingum, Perry, and Morgan Counties, and
 22 one of the ways in which we do that is to provide
 23 assistance for housing and utilities. And we're
 24 certainly appreciative of the partnership that we have
 25 with Columbia Gas to provide assistance to those who

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1 cannot afford their utility payments currently, which
 2 is significant. And we've dedicated over 10 percent
 3 of our annual allocation just for utility payments
 4 this year. Unfortunately, that will be woefully
 5 inadequate to help people with the existing utility
 6 rates as they are now. I would like to register grave
 7 concern about raising these rates and the ability for
 8 people, the residents of Muskingum County, to afford
 9 them.
 10 The mayor pointed out, quite correctly,
 11 about the poverty rate, but there's an additional
 12 percentage that I would like the commission to be
 13 aware of, and that's the percentage of ALICE
 14 households that are in Muskingum County. And ALICE
 15 stands for the acronym Asset Limited, Income
 16 Constrained, Employed. These are folks obviously that
 17 are working very hard, but they cannot afford a
 18 survival budget when it comes to the following five
 19 areas: food costs, transportation costs, childcare,
 20 health care, and housing. And all of those costs, of
 21 course, are going up. So again, we can't -- it -- it
 22 would be disingenuous to simply look at the poverty
 23 rate. When looking at the ability to bear these cost
 24 increase, we also need to look at that next level.
 25 When you take a look at that in Muskingum County,

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1 that's over 40 percent of the households in Muskingum
2 County would fall into that category, so I wanted
3 to -- I wanted that to be on the record.
4 I would also -- and I realize this
5 isn't a question and answer. I would just like to
6 state that if this rate increase does go into effect,
7 I would be interested in hearing if Columbia Gas has
8 any plans for additional assistance to provide to
9 these households, and so I will be anxiously awaiting
10 that information as well as the results of this
11 decision. Thank you.
12 THE COURT: Thank you.
13 Questions?
14 Thank you again.
15 THE COMMISSIONER: Okay. Next we have
16 Brenda Zeta.
17 MS. ZIENTA: Zienta.
18 THE COMMISSIONER: Zienta. I'm so
19 sorry.
20 MS. ZIENTA: I did not -- oh. I'm
21 sorry.
22 My name's Brenda Zienta.
23 //
24 //
25 //

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1 WHEREUPON,
2 BRENDA ZIENTA,
3 called as a witness, and having been first duly sworn
4 to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but
5 the truth, was examined and testified as follows:
6 THE COURT: Please proceed.
7 THE WITNESS-5: My name's Brenda
8 Zienta, a resident of Zanesville, Ohio. Address is
9 2055 -- I'm going to spell it to you -- it's C as in
10 Charles, H-E-W-E-L-A-H Avenue -- Chewelah --
11 Zanesville, Ohio.
12 I am a resident of Muskingum County. I
13 have been for almost 61 years. Born and raised in
14 Zanesville. I have worked in Zanesville. I am a
15 paraprofessional, which is a teacher's assistant. I
16 am also a registered nurse. And due to cost of health
17 insurance, I work at the elementary school full time
18 for the insurance. I also work as a registered nurse
19 part time after I leave my full-time job. I have a
20 disabled husband that's been disabled for 11 years.
21 My income -- our total -- falls right at the poverty
22 level, but I'm not eligible for any assistance
23 food-wise, medical-wise, or anything else because I
24 work two jobs and we are homeowners.
25 I work for a union at the elementary

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1 school, and our union just accepted a 50-cent per hour
2 raise, which comes to a total of, like, a hundred and
3 -- I don't -- maybe it's \$320 -- something like
4 that -- which is a percentage of less than 1 or 2
5 percent of what our income is. I can't imagine 27
6 percent increase in just my utilities.
7 Like I stated, I am a home health
8 nurse. I go into people's homes to take care of them,
9 and a lot of those elderly people in Muskingum County
10 have to decide, am I going to pay my utilities, am I
11 going to buy groceries, or am I going to buy medicine?
12 You know, thank goodness, you know, their insurance or
13 Medicaid is covering their health benefits of us going
14 into their homes.
15 Poverty is an extreme, extreme concern
16 in Muskingum County. Like everybody else was saying,
17 you know, we are working poor. And with the price of
18 gas now, there's no way that you can afford to drive
19 to Columbus to try to get a better income because
20 you're going to be spending it all out in your wear
21 and tear on your vehicle and your gas. So I am hoping
22 that you can see the need of Zanesville and the
23 surrounding area that we honestly cannot afford this
24 pay hike. So I appreciate your time. Thank you.
25 THE COURT: Thank you.

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1 THE COMMISSIONER: Okay. I'd like to
2 call Jeffrey -- and I'm -- I can't -- is there a
3 Jeffrey?
4 MR. DAVIS: I'm Jeffrey.
5 Okay. I'm so sorry. I just can't read
6 your writing.
7 MR. DAVIS: Jeffrey L. Davis. Yeah. I
8 should've wrote it on the card.
9 THE COMMISSIONER: That's okay.
10 WHEREUPON,
11 JEFFREY DAVIS,
12 called as a witness, and having been first duly sworn
13 to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but
14 the truth, was examined and testified as follows:
15 THE WITNESS-6: I want to --
16 THE COURT: Please state --
17 THE WITNESS-6: -- first thank you all
18 for coming and listening to us, and I want to thank
19 Mayor Mason for his expert information. And I was
20 born and raised here and left in 1982 and came back in
21 2018. And I've been living in the Columbus area, most
22 recently in Delaware suburb, and the difference, as
23 Mayor Mason was -- is just tremendous. It's -- it's
24 even very different from what it was in 1982 when I
25 left.

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1 I'm also very involved with the
 2 recovering movement here, so we have a lot of problems
 3 that way. We have a lot of poverty as has been
 4 mentioned, and I just don't think this is the time for
 5 it because we have, of course -- you know, highest
 6 inflation in many decades. We're very likely looking
 7 at a recession, you know, and, you know, we've had --
 8 last time we had this kind of inflation, wages were
 9 pretty good, but we've had 30, 40 years now of wage
 10 stagnation and I would say wage suppression to add
 11 onto all of what other people have mentioned. Thank
 12 you.

13 THE COURT: Thank you.

14 THE COMMISSIONER: Next we have
 15 Don DePerro.

16 WHEREUPON,
 17 DON DEPERRO,
 18 called as a witness, and having been first duly sworn
 19 to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but
 20 the truth, was examined and testified as follows:
 21 THE COURT: Please state your name and
 22 address for the record.

23 THE WITNESS-7: Don DePerro. And my
 24 business address is 150 South Front Street, Columbus
 25 43215.

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1 Mayor Mason, Chairwoman French, Vice
 2 Chair Trumbold, and members of the Public Utilities
 3 Commission of Ohio, I am the president and CEO of the
 4 Columbus Chamber of Commerce. Thank you for this
 5 opportunity to provide testimony in support of
 6 Columbia Gas of Ohio as you consider the company's
 7 rate increase proposal this evening.

8 As a leading voice for the business
 9 community across Central Ohio, the Columbus Chamber
 10 represents nearly 2300 member businesses across the
 11 11-county Columbus region. Our mission is to lead and
 12 support economic growth and development in our region
 13 with the charge of promoting growth and prosperity.
 14 Overall, we strive to attract new businesses to the
 15 region while helping our existing businesses grow and
 16 prosper, while also supporting entrepreneurs in their
 17 journey to start new businesses.

18 Today our region is experiencing
 19 exponential growth, growth in business development and
 20 in population. With this growth comes a need for a
 21 reliable infrastructure. And although infrastructure
 22 comes in many forms, I'm here to address the need for
 23 the infrastructure of our utilities, the need for our
 24 region to be provided utility services in the most
 25 cost-effective way that's reliable and that businesses

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1 can rely on to grow and to succeed. This, in turn,
 2 will help us at the Columbus Chamber fulfill our
 3 mission of attracting new talent and businesses
 4 throughout our region. Having modern, new, and
 5 upgraded pipelines provides greater efficiency and
 6 greater reliability of service. Pipelines and the
 7 products they carry help enhance economic growth for
 8 communities across our region and across the country.
 9 This development also contributes to job creation
 10 because not only are people employed to maintain
 11 current and existing pipelines, direct and spin-off
 12 jobs are created when new pipelines are built or need
 13 to be serviced.

14 Columbia Gas's plan to invest millions
 15 in improving its natural gas pipeline system across
 16 the entire state is going to be essential for jobs and
 17 for the environment, which are meaningful and
 18 significant benefits to local governments and to all
 19 of our residents. For our communities in Central
 20 Ohio, we also see implementation of energy-efficient
 21 measures as an important strategy to reduce greenhouse
 22 gas emissions and to achieve higher air quality
 23 standards for our region.

24 We are fortunate here to have the
 25 presence of Columbia Gas, a company that has a solid

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1 history of community and regional stewardship and is
 2 dedicated to providing safe and reliable service to
 3 its customers, both residential and commercial. This
 4 investment is important not only to our region's
 5 economic health but also to Ohio's well-being. Access
 6 to quality energy services enables all of us to live
 7 healthier, longer, and more prosperous lives. Think
 8 of all the things that would not be possible without
 9 reliable sources of energy such as our food
 10 production, education, medical care, communications,
 11 science, and technology. All of these have a direct
 12 correlation with reliable sources of energy. And as
 13 long as we have oil and gas in our lives, we will need
 14 to transport those products over long distances to the
 15 people who need and benefit from them directly.

16 Further, like other forms of
 17 infrastructure, our nation's energy infrastructure is
 18 a key driver of job creation, growth, and
 19 competitiveness. Maintaining a modern, flexible, and
 20 secure network of oil and natural gas pipelines is
 21 essential to delivering affordable and reliable energy
 22 to Ohio businesses and consumers, which then promotes
 23 growth across all sectors of our economy.

24 The Columbus Chamber of Commerce is
 25 proud to have a partner like Columbia Gas to help us

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1 fulfill our mission of continued growth and
 2 prosperity, which, in turn, means jobs for our region.
 3 We thank the PUCO for your consideration and look
 4 forward to continuing the conversation on how we can
 5 best support our partners at Columbia Gas. Thank you.
 6 THE COURT: Thank you.
 7 Any questions for this witness?
 8 MR. MICHAEL: Yes, Your Honor. Please.
 9 THE COURT: Mr. Michael.
 10 DIRECT EXAMINATION
 11 BY MR. MICHAEL:
 12 Q Thank you for your testimony, Mr. DePerro.
 13 A Absolutely.
 14 Q During your testimony you referenced on a
 15 number of occasions "in our region." Is Muskingum
 16 County in your region?
 17 A We service an 11-county area. Muskingum --
 18 Muskingum County is just outside. I came out to visit
 19 your beautiful community because I had a conflict and
 20 could not testify in Columbus.
 21 Q Just so the record's clear, I am a visitor
 22 too, but it is a beautiful community, and I thank the
 23 good people of Muskingum County for --
 24 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Please --
 25 THE WITNESS-7: I actually enjoy

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1 playing golf out here.
 2 BY MR. MICHAEL:
 3 Q But so the record's clear, Muskingum County
 4 is not part of your region.
 5 A It's not a direct part of the 11-county. It
 6 does border the 11-county Columbus region.
 7 Q Okay. And during your testimony, you talked
 8 frequently about businesses and entrepreneurs and the
 9 chamber's role in helping them and fostering an
 10 environment for success for them. Tonight you heard a
 11 number of different residents of Muskingum County.
 12 Are you going to take what you heard tonight back to
 13 your businesses and entrepreneurs and let them know
 14 that the people of Muskingum County that testified
 15 tonight oppose the rate increase that Columbia has
 16 proposed?
 17 A I would -- if I was asked, I'd be more than
 18 happy to share that. Absolutely.
 19 Q Would you consider volunteering it to your
 20 members so they know what the common people in
 21 Muskingum County are saying about the rate increase?
 22 A I don't know if I'd directly publicize it,
 23 but I would be happy to share it if I was asked if --
 24 to give that feedback. And it was important for us at
 25 the Columbus Chamber to hear that testimony.

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1 Q I'm glad you heard it.
 2 A Mm-hmm.
 3 Q Sir, you also mentioned a couple of times
 4 during your testimony -- or I should say referenced --
 5 Columbia's investments, and I believe one time I wrote
 6 it down. You discussed their investment of millions
 7 of dollars in infrastructure and things like that.
 8 You realize they're charging consumers the money to
 9 make those investments. Correct?
 10 A Yes, and I believe this is their first rate
 11 increase in 14 years.
 12 Q And you --
 13 A They have not asked for a rate increase --
 14 if I'm not mistaken -- since 2008.
 15 Q And you know they're asking for
 16 \$212,000,000. Correct?
 17 A I am aware of the amount.
 18 Q And you heard testimony tonight from
 19 residents of Muskingum County talking about a 27
 20 percent increase in their bills.
 21 A Let me mention.
 22 Q Correct?
 23 A We have a lot of activity with the state of
 24 Ohio, and our vice president of government relations
 25 is with me, Desmond Bryant. And we will be more than

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1 happy to support any and all government subsidies to
 2 help those who cannot afford to pay their utility
 3 bills.
 4 MR. MICHAEL: Your Honor, I'll move to
 5 strike that answer as nonresponsive and request that
 6 the court reporter read my question back, and if the
 7 witness would please answer the question asked.
 8 THE COURT: Your motion to strike is
 9 denied. I believe that was his answer.
 10 MR. MICHAEL: It was his answer, but it
 11 wasn't responsive, but I thank you, Your Honor.
 12 THE COURT: Thank you.
 13 BY MR. MICHAEL:
 14 Q One last question, sir, and I do appreciate
 15 your time. You referenced a number of times during
 16 your testimony the importance of reliable sources of
 17 energy and the reliability of the utility
 18 infrastructure. Can you point to any example
 19 currently where Columbia's natural gas system is
 20 unreliable?
 21 A If these pipelines aren't maintained,
 22 they're susceptible to rupture, to explosions, to
 23 very, very dangerous outcomes. They need to be
 24 maintained. They need to be upgraded and replaced.
 25 Safety and security is of the utmost importance to our

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1 citizens.

2 Q And in that answer, sir, are you suggesting

3 that Columbia's natural gas system is, what, on the

4 cusp of --

5 A No. I'm not suggesting that whatsoever.

6 Q Okay. Good. Thank you.

7 A What I am suggesting, though, is that

8 maintenance of these pipelines is extremely important.

9 MR. MICHAEL: Thank you very much.

10 No further questions, Your Honor.

11 Thank you.

12 THE COURT: Thank you.

13 Thank you. Thank you for your time.

14 THE WITNESS-7: Thank you.

15 THE COURT: Yes, Mr. Davis.

16 THE WITNESS-6: Yes, Honor --

17 Your Honor. I would just like clarification of who is

18 the gentleman representing.

19 THE COURT: I believe he represents the

20 Columbus Chamber of Commerce.

21 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yes.

22 THE WITNESS-7: We have nearly 2300

23 member businesses.

24 THE WITNESS-6: And I challenge your

25 standing to testify ...

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1 THE COURT: Well, anybody from the

2 state can come and testify to any public hearing.

3 This is not limited to this area. We've had five

4 public hearings across the state.

5 THE WITNESS-6: -- no. I meant that

6 just to say that we've all noted that he is not a

7 member of --

8 THE COURT: I think he made that clear.

9 Would anybody like to testify that has

10 not previously signed up?

11 Yes, sir.

12 WHEREUPON,

13 CHRIS STEELE,

14 called as a witness, and having been first duly sworn

15 to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but

16 the truth, was examined and testified as follows:

17 THE COURT: Please state your name and

18 address for the record.

19 THE WITNESS-8: My name is

20 Chris Steele. S-T-E-E-L-E. I serve as the lead

21 minister at North Terrace Church of Christ in

22 Zanesville, Ohio. The address is 1420 Brandywine

23 Boulevard, Zanesville, Ohio.

24 THE COURT: Please proceed.

25 THE WITNESS-8: Thank you, Your Honor

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1 and those who come to serve our community and our

2 state. I'm very grateful for Don Mason as the mayor

3 of our community and the activity he does on behalf of

4 our citizens. Zanesville is a town that has many

5 leaders who advocate for its residents. And I come on

6 behalf of the spiritual leaders in our community who

7 serve many who've been mentioned in our time together

8 today, many who are in distress financially, who

9 encounter a multitude of challenges, whether those be

10 physical, economic, sometimes even educational. I

11 could probably keep going with the list. But these

12 are people who are good people who are working hard to

13 make the best of a life that they've been given. Many

14 of them have little to no margin but are doing well

15 with what they have. Many of them are advancing their

16 lives at this point as wages have risen recently and

17 jobs have become more common. That's encouraging.

18 But there is a multitude of factors beginning to rise

19 against people in our area, in particular, that will

20 create a multitude of financial distress.

21 Citizen Gas -- Columbia Gas -- my -- my

22 grandmother worked for Citizens Gas in Indianapolis.

23 It's hardwired in there. Columbia Gas has been a

24 worthy partner and I think should be acknowledged as

25 someone who has served our community and region well,

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1 and I look forward to them continuing that in the

2 future. I think it's fair for them to expect a profit

3 so they can maintain their business and advance the

4 ability to resource businesses and residents in our

5 region. But there should be a reasonable expectation

6 of what that profit is on the backs of those who pay

7 the majority of those bills, especially when many of

8 them have no margin at all if those prices increase at

9 the rates mentioned here.

10 The rising rates that we are seeing

11 when they are mentioned by my people on Sunday morning

12 -- and it -- that's why I'm here. This is not

13 something I do normally, but in the midst of a Sunday

14 morning worship service, walking around, saying, "How

15 are you doing, George?" and George doesn't want to

16 talk about the weather, which is a lot more fun, or

17 talk about what his wife's making for lunch, but is

18 saying, "Chris, have you heard about what they're

19 going to be doing with the gas?" And I said, "George,

20 I've been reading," and I'm grateful that we have a

21 mayor who understands the numbers of it more than I

22 do, but George is concerned.

23 Tuesday at our church we had a senior

24 adult event. About 60 folks who are on fixed income,

25 retired, many of them doing okay but starting to

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1 express, "If this happens, I will have to make a
 2 choice between medicine, food, or fuel for my car."
 3 Now, that gets my attention, and I think it's worthy
 4 of leaders in our community to stand up and say,
 5 "Let's have important conversations about this" so
 6 that we have the infrastructure we need to go forward
 7 as a community but also so we take care of our
 8 residents who are the backbone of this community and
 9 gotten us to this point.
 10 So I ask those of you who are in charge
 11 of this to consider the impact that this will not just
 12 have immediately but that it will have in the
 13 generations to come. I lived in Zanesville for nine
 14 years, and I had several conversations within my first
 15 couple years here as I realized that our poverty
 16 problem -- poverty problem is not a recent
 17 development. We have multigenerational poverty, and
 18 the solutions to that are not to raise costs so much
 19 that they cannot get the education they need, the
 20 health care they need, or the other support systems.
 21 We need to create ways and on-ramps for them to escape
 22 the traps of poverty they've been in. Decisions to
 23 raise rates like this right now would be something
 24 that I believe 10, 15, or even 20 years from now we
 25 would look back and say, that was a decision that kept

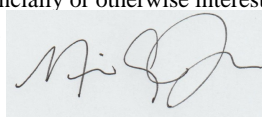
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1 our people in poverty, did not equip them to escape
 2 it.
 3 So I ask you to take all those things
 4 into mind to make the wisest decision you can based on
 5 numbers that I do not fully understand, but I
 6 understand people. And I'm here to speak on their
 7 behalf. Thank you for your time.
 8 THE COURT: Thank you.
 9 Any questions for this witness?
 10 Thank you for your time.
 11 Anybody else care to testify?
 12 THE COMMISSIONER: We've -- we've had
 13 the most testimony of any of our hearings tonight, so
 14 thank you all for coming out. I do appreciate hearing
 15 from everyone, and we will continue to incorporate
 16 this into our record, and the commissioners -- the
 17 other commissioners have been attending hearings as
 18 well throughout the state. And we will all be
 19 deliberating on this at a later date when the -- all
 20 the information on the hearing is -- has been
 21 compiled.
 22 So thank you again for coming out
 23 tonight. Again, is there anyone else who would like
 24 to testify before we close?
 25 No one. Okay. Thank you again.

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1 THE COURT: Thank you. With that we
 2 are adjourned. We are off the record.
 3 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Thank you.
 4 THE REPORTER: We are going off the
 5 record at 6:45 p.m.
 6 (Whereupon, at 6:45 p.m., the
 7 proceeding was concluded.)
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1 CERTIFICATE OF DEPOSITION OFFICER
 2 I, NIC JOSEPH SAUL, the officer before whom
 3 the foregoing proceedings were taken, do hereby
 4 certify that any witness(es) in the foregoing
 5 proceedings, prior to testifying, were duly sworn;
 6 that the proceedings were recorded by me and
 7 thereafter reduced to typewriting by a qualified
 8 transcriptionist; that said digital audio recording of
 9 said proceedings are a true and accurate record to the
 10 best of my knowledge, skills, and ability; that I am
 11 neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any
 12 of the parties to the action in which this was taken;
 13 and, further, that I am not a relative or employee of
 14 any counsel or attorney employed by the parties
 15 hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the
 16 outcome of this
 17 
 18 NIC JOSEPH SAUL
 19 Notary Public in and for the
 20 State of Ohio
 21
 22
 23
 24
 25

CERTIFICATE OF TRANSCRIBER

1
2 I, ERICA MAKUCH, do hereby certify that this
3 transcript was prepared from the digital audio
4 recording of the foregoing proceeding, that said
5 transcript is a true and accurate record of the
6 proceedings to the best of my knowledge, skills, and
7 ability; that I am neither counsel for, related to,
8 nor employed by any of the parties to the action in
9 which this was taken; and, further, that I am not a
10 relative or employee of any counsel or attorney
11 employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or
12 otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

13
14 
15 ERICA MAKUCH

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25

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