BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF OHIO

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In the Matter of the
Review of the Ohio Edison
Company, The Cleveland
Electric Illuminating
:

Company, and the Toledo : Case No. 17-0974-EL-UNC

Edison Company's Compliance: With R.C. 4928.17 and the : Ohio Adm. Code Chapter : 4901:1-37.

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PROCEEDINGS

Before Gregory Price and Meagan Addison, Attorney Examiners, at the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio, 180 East Broad Street, Room 11D, Columbus, Ohio, called at 10:00 a.m. on Thursday, January 17, 2019.

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4	WITNESSES: None			PAGE
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January 17, 2019.

ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: Good morning.

Thursday Morning Session,

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The Public Utilities Commission has set for hearing at this time and place Case No. 17-974-EL-UNC, being In the Matter of the Review of the Ohio Edison Company, the Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company and the Toledo Edison Company's Compliance with Revised Code 4918.17, and Ohio Administrative Code Chapter 4901:1-37.

My name is Gregory Price. With me is
Megan Addison. We're the Attorney Examiners assigned
to preside over today's hearing.

The purpose of today's hearing is to address the Motion for Protective Order filed by FirstEnergy on October 26, 2018, Consumers' Counsel filed a memo contra on November 13, 2018.

The companies filed a reply on November 20th, 2018. The Attorney-Examiners set this matter for hearing by entry issued on December 14, 2018.

We'll begin. Let's take appearances starting with the company.

MR. DORINGO: Ryan Doringo of Jones-Day on behalf of the Ohio Edison Company, the Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company and the Toledo Edison Company. And with me is Scott Casto of FirstEnergy, also on behalf of the companies.

ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: Consumers'
Council.

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MR. LANDES: I'm here for the Ohio
Consumer Counsel. My name is Mark Landes with the
law firm of Isaac Wiles here in town. I'll let my
colleagues introduce themself.

MS. O'BRIEN: On behalf of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel, Angela O'Brien.

ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: Thank you.

Mr. Alexander, would you like to make an appearance?

MR. ALEXANDER: Good morning, your

Honor. My name is Trevor Alexander. I represent

FirstEnergy Solutions Corp. FES is not a party to

this proceeding, and I'm here today as an observer.

ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: Thank you. Okay. Why don't we begin by clarifying what we discussed off the record.

Companies you have no intention of presenting a witness today to support whether or not the information being sought by Consumers' Counsel is

trade secret under Ohio law; is that correct?

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MR. DORINGO: That is correct, your Honor. Our argument is not that the information sought by the Consumers' Counsel is trade secret, but that it's otherwise confidential information protected by R.C. 4901.16.

ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: Okay. Why don't you briefly then go into your argument?

MR. DORINGO: Thank you your Honors.

Your Honors, the question before you today is whether there is any protection for the confidential and sensitive business information that utilities like the companies provide during the audit process.

And another question before you today is whether the Commission will permit intervenors in audit cases to circumvent and subvert the discovery rules in order -- by using a public records request in order to get information that is admittedly, in this case, not relevant to the main audit case.

As you know, and as the Commission has long recognized, the free flow and open sharing of information between utilities and the Commission during the audit process is absolutely critical to that process.

On the one hand, the Commission needs to

have at its disposal, you know, the books and records, and access to those books and records of the utilities to do its job and carry out its statutory mandate, and on the other, the utilities and the companies here need to have some assurance and some protection for the confidential information that they give to Staff and auditor, or other employees of the Commission during the audit process.

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And of course, the public records statute, RC 149.43, builds in protections to give utilities those assurances. One of those is, of course, the provision that prohibits the disclosure of information or documents, the release of which is prohibited by state or federal law.

And within that provision of the public records statute, we find protection for trade secrets, which as we discussed are not at issue here, but we also find broader protection than that.

We find protection for confidential information that does not arise to the level of a trade secret. And in this case that protection is provided by R.C. 4901.16, which in no uncertain terms says that the employees or agents of the Commission, except for in their testimony before the Commission, or court, or in reports, may not disclose -- or shall

not disclose information acquired by them in carrying out their duties -- acquired from the utilities by those employees and agents in carrying out their duties.

2.1

Your Honor, the -- your Honors, the Ohio Supreme Court has construed R.C. 4901.16 as imposing a duty of confidentiality upon the Commission's agents and employees, and that's in the Vectren case, 113 Ohio State 3d, 180, 2007.

Likewise, the Commission itself has, at least on two occasions, recognized that R.C. 4901.16 operates as an exception to the Public Records statute.

The first instance of that was in the CG&E case, Case No. 00681-GA-GPS, and again, more recently in an AEP Ohio case, Case No. 115906-EL-FAC.

But, your Honors, there is no dispute here that if R.C. 4901.16 --

ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: In either of those two cases that you just cited, do the -- did the Commission assert that 4901.16 precludes the release of otherwise public information after the issuance of the Staff Report in the case?

MR. DORINGO: Your Honor, so I hear correctly, your question is whether otherwise

information that's already public, whether they
precluded the release --

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ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: Information that otherwise would be a public record is precluded from disclosure after -- let me simplify the question.

In either of the two cases you have cited, did the Commission preclude the disclosure of any information after the filing of the Staff Report?

MR. DORINGO: So in the CG&E case, it was in a different context. The report there was --

ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: As to CG&E that would be no?

MR. DORINGO: As to CG&E that would be no, your Honor. And in the AEP Ohio case the answer is also no there.

ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: Thank you.

MR. DORINGO: There is -- there is no dispute under the Commission's precedent in the plain language of 4901.16 that if 4901.16 does apply to these documents, that they are not subject to disclosure pursuant to a public records request.

And R.C. 4901.16 does apply here, and it applies for several reasons. First, its plain language. These are -- the 14 documents that are at

issue are absolutely records that were acquired by an agent of the Commission, Sage, and by Staff, in the -- in connection with their duties during the audit process. Our documents fall squarely within that definition.

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Second, Commission precedent, particularly the CG&E case. Your Honors, the CG&E case ruled that information provided in confidence to the Staff during an investigation was not subject to disclosure under R.C. 4901.16.

Third, the Commission in this case expressly ordered that Sage's work would be done subject to R.C. 4901.16. In it's July 5, 2017 Entry appointing Sage as the auditor, the Commission said that Sage would be subject expressly to its statutory obligations under that statute.

Further in that order it told the companies that they must provide any information asked for by Sage or Staff, without objection and without delay.

They also told the companies they could mark information confidential if they so wished, but that was not a reason to object or delay in giving that information over.

And the companies did that, your Honors.

They provided everything that was asked for regardless of whether -- whether we believed it was relevant or the confidential nature of it.

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So, your Honors, if R.C. 4901.16 doesn't apply here where the plain language of the statute says it does, where Commission precedent further supports it, and where the Commission ordered the companies to provide that information without objection and delay -- or delay, and the companies did so in reliance on the statute, and reliance on the Commission's order, then R.C. 4901.16 is never going to apply to audit processes, and it's essentially a dead letter.

ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: Why would it be a dead letter? Let's just make the record clear here. You would agree the audit report is finished in this case; is that correct?

MR. DORINGO: Yes, your Honor.

ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: Why would it be a dead letter if 4901.16 protected the information prior to the issuance of the Staff Report from disclosure, but not after the issuance of the Staff Report?

MR. DORINGO: Well, your Honor, I think the -- the companies' interest, and legitimate

interest, and the policy interest of the Commission in promoting the open and free sharing of information need -- means that R.C. 4901.16 has to provide some more enduring protection for the confidential information that is given to -- to the Staff or to the auditor, or else --

ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: But you'd agree also that the Supreme Court has held that 149.43 should be construed liberally; is that not correct?

MR. DORINGO: That's correct. That's correct, we don't dispute that.

ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: And so our goal here is for us to balance two statutes, 149.43 and 4901.16?

MR. DORINGO: Yes.

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ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: And so why is it not a fair balance to say prior to the issuing of the Staff Report, nothing, even if it's public or nonconfidential, can come out pursuant to 4901.16, but after the issuance of the Staff Report, absent some other protection, it should be released?

MR. DORINGO: Your Honor, I think

several reasons. One, the statute itself contains no such limitation.

Two, I don't believe that the Commission in the CG&E case, or otherwise, has ruled that that limitation applies to the statute, and three, as a policy matter, when we're dealing with information that the companies provided in confidence, that now is concededly irrelevant by the OCC, is irrelevant to the corporate separation case, this specific information we're dealing with here must be protected.

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ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: Okay. But let's dispense with that argument, and also with the evading discovery argument.

You would agree the Commission has no right to ask any requester of a public record why they are asking for the request? Wouldn't you agree that -- that's black letter law in the state, correct?

MR. DORINGO: I agree, yes, that -ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: So it doesn't
matter what their intent, what their purpose is,
somebody asks for a public record from the
Commission, we have to disclose it.

MR. DORINGO: Well, I don't agree -well, if you say that none of the exceptions in the
record --

1 ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: No exceptions 2 apply. 3 MR. DORINGO: -- none of those apply, and it's a public record, yes. 4 5 ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: The intent of 6 the requester is irrelevant, and we're not even 7 permitted to inquire; you agree with that? 8 MR. DORINGO: I agree that the intent of 9 the requester is irrelevant. 10 ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: Even if they 11 are intending to circumvent discovery, that's 12 irrelevant for today, right? 13 MR. DORINGO: I don't agree that it's 14 irrelevant for today because of the policy 15 implications of the conduct. And I mean, it's tied up with whether R.C. 4901.16 provides the protection 16 17 we say it does or not. 18 And the reason is, if we're in -- if 19 we're in a world where R.C. 4901.16 doesn't apply --20 doesn't apply any of the protections that it says it 2.1 does, or that Commission precedent says it does, the 22 companies are going to have to change how they 23 approach audit proceedings --24 ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: You have no 25 right to change how you approach audit proceedings

because we have a separate statute that says we can investigate all of your books and records; isn't that correct?

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Under the laws of the State of Ohio,

PUCO employee holding this card may enter in or upon
and inspect any property and all of those materials
of any company regulated by the Public Utility

Commission of Ohio.

So you have no ability to change your approach to an audit. You have to provide the information, if we direct you to, as long as it's related to your regulated business; is that not correct?

MR. DORINGO: I agree that's correct, your Honor. And that's also why I think R.C. 4901.16 is absolutely crucial to the process and must provide the protection that we say it does, because if it doesn't, then anything that we hand over to the Commission or its auditor or Staff, without -- that we're ordered to hand over, as in this case, we can never know whether it's going to become public record as upon the mere submission of a records request.

And I do think that it will have some chilling affect of the companies will have to be -- and other utilities will have to be more

discriminating in what they hand over, or at least it will lengthen and make the process more inefficient.

So yeah, I mean, that's my response to that question.

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And then OCC claims that this case is about thwarting transparency or hiding relevant documents that would tell them and anyone else about whether the companies are complying with the corporate separation rules, and your Honors, those claims are demonstrably false here.

This case is not about secrecy or, you know, the Commission or the companies hiding anything. The companies -- well, as you know, since the beginning of this case OCC has attempted to get everything that the companies provided to Sage.

We said no before -- that those requests were premature before the audit report was issued.

The Commission didn't rule on that in this case before the audit report was issued.

But I think we have been validated in that, and under the DMR audit case the decision that recently came out there that that discovery was premature.

But after that audit report came out we worked through good faith negotiation with OCC to give them everything that was remotely relevant to

that report.

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What we didn't think was relevant, we asked them if they still wanted it, they said we're going to continue on with our motion, and so we issued a -- filed a supplemental memoranda contra.

After we filed that, demonstrated the irrelevance of the documents, OCC withdrew its motion.

And so again, they can ask for -- they can make any request they want with any intent they have, but they are not entitled to everything they ask for. And here the conduct at issue where, we went through a long negotiation and briefing process --

ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: I'm not saying -- I'm not saying you don't have cause to be annoyed with OCC, I'm just saying that that's not a grounds for us to release the information.

MR. DORINGO: That's right. But I think it goes to the policy support for providing this protection under R.C. 4901.16.

Your Honor, just in closing, the R.C.
4901.16 applies here. It applies because it's broad
language applied, it applies because Commission
precedent supports it, and it applies because the

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Commission told us it did in its July Entry, 2017
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     entry in this case.
                  The Commission should hold that R.C.
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     4901.16 precludes the disclosure of the records at
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     issue, and not otherwise enter an order that
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     threatens efficacy of the audit process. Thank you.
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                  ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: Thank you.
     Consumers' Counsel, one preliminary matter. On
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     November 13th you filed a pleading styled Memorandum
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     Contra the Motion Filed by the FirstEnergy Utilities
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     to thwart transparency and fairness regarding the
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     PUCO's audit of FirstEnergy's corporate separation
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     practices; is that correct?
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                  MR. LANDES: I'm looking at it, too.
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                  ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: Did the
     companies ever file a motion styled a motion filed to
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     thwart transparency and fairness?
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                  MR. LANDES: That's a fair question.
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     They did not. That's not how it was titled.
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                  ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: So let's have
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     a little less propaganda in our filings next time, or
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    maybe we'll just strike the filing and simplify our
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     lives.
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                  MR. LANDES: Point well taken.
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you.

ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: Please proceed.

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MR. LANDES: Thank you. I'd like to attempt to start where you are, I think, from your questions, and that is a simple infamy, a logical structure.

You have public records, the Commission does. There is a claim for -- the sole claimed exception deals with .16. Your own jurisprudence within the Commission indicates that that lasts as long as the investigation does, and no longer.

We compiled in our awkwardly styled pleading at Footnote 14 -- we have collected those hearing decisions that say exactly what you've said, which is the juice in that exception dissipates and is gone after the hearing is over.

And without dispute -- the investigation rather, the investigation is over. So therefore, there's no exception, and therefore they are public records subject to disclosure. That's what I believe the Hearing Officer has come to, and certainly what the pleading suggest.

If I can add value, your Honor, to the proceeding any further than that, it would be from the perspective of an open records lawyer, and not as

a PUCO lawyer, because that's what I'm here to do.

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And so we can talk about some of the concerns that have been raised about reliance, we can talk about how the process would otherwise go in another place, and how we might examine the process that we have here in a way that could assist you and the Commission in the future.

So the first point to make is one you made out of the box, which is this is not a discovery issue, this is a public records issue.

A very similar issue was brought in a case that was cited, Ed Gilbert versus Akron. Ed Gilbert is a well known lawyer in Akron. He's in the middle of litigation. He misses the discovery deadline.

The trial is about to come. He sends out public records requests to Akron for all of the information they could have, should have, would have gotten during the discovery issue.

That goes to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court holds for Ed Gilbert, and says notwithstanding another proceeding going on, a judicial proceeding in Common Pleas Court, notwithstanding the fact that that court could easily say under policy that we need to run our own

discovery, we need to have rules that make sense for both parties, and we set a deadline and it should be honored, no withstanding all of that, they said public records is separate, and public records shall be looked at separately from any other issue.

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And in much the same way that we have heard of we need to have the reliance on the rules, and we were told that this -- we could mark these things confidential, that is all done with the heavy hand of the public records laying on their shoulder saying if you deal with the government, what you give the government becomes public record.

This is precisely the same issue that thousands of other people have dealt with, and have been litigated to the Supreme Court, one in which I got to play on, which was dealt with Blue Cross.

When Blue Cross wanted to demutualize and -- a word I've never said since, by the way -- and become Medical Mutual, they had to give a lot of information to the Ohio Department of Insurance.

The Plain Dealer asked for it, and what is supposed to happen -- let me say what happens everywhere else, I'll put it that way, is that a proceeding is brought by the Plain Dealer to enforce the public records request, if it's not honored

promptly, and the person who provided the records to the government may intervene, and they can state their case.

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Typically it's trade secrets, is what case they state. They have not stated that case here.

That could happen now in Common Pleas

Court because that's where original actions in

mandamus need to be filed, Common Pleas, Court of

Appeals, Ohio Supreme Court, and now new and

improved, the Court of Claims where Special Master

Judge Clark will tell you whether it's public or not,

and in my experience so far he'll tell you it's

public.

Representing all the full suburbs in town and 66 counties and 110 school districts, that's the answer we're getting from Special Master Judge Clark; it's public.

So I have no reason to think that that would not happen here if such a proceeding would be brought -- could be brought. They can intervene.

They can say the policy arguments they want. If they have a trade secret claim, they can make it there.

That's how it's supposed to happen if the body does not provide the records promptly.

Promptly has been defined to be violated in as early as two months. The request was originally made here in May, so we are past promptly, arguably if we were in another forum.

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I'm not whining, I just want to bring that to everybody's attention, that we went down a different path that would not look like the normal path, and we ought to wonder whether or not that would -- what the Supreme Court, if they looked at us, would think of all that.

Would they think that we ought to be having hearing here today under an Ohio

Administrative Code that mentions discovery several times, but not public records several times. So having --

ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: Certainly they -- certainly if there is a claim of confidential information, they would say you have to have a hearing, and they have told us that.

MR. LANDES: Thank you. That is a fair thing. I think that if you --

ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: Let me push you a little bit though on where -- I agree that we have to balance 149.43 and 4901.16. Let me push you on where that line is.

Why would it be inappropriate under the public records law to draw that line at the conclusion of the Commission proceedings, and after we have issued a final appealable order and released jurisdiction, if it -- why is it the investigation concludes with the filing of the report, rather than the conclusion of all proceedings? Because we could further investigate any matter, could we not?

MR. LANDES: Yes.

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ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: So why should the line be at the filing the report versus when we issue a final appealable order?

MR. LANDES: I think the line should be elsewhere, and the line should not -- the line should not allow the statute, 4901.16, to keep any public records at any time from the public.

I don't believe that -- it doesn't say -- this is one thing we agree on. It doesn't say that the protection lasts until the investigation is over.

So we have drawn the line in a manner in which to try to balance -- and it's in prior hearing decisions, and they have been cited in 14. That's where the lines have been drawn by Hearing Officers; however, it's not supported by the statute at all.

If anything --

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ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: The statute -the statute says I can't disclose anything except
through the filing of the Staff Report.

MR. LANDES: Fair enough.

ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: Not withstanding whether it's confidential or not, if it's a number I learned that is a public number, in a hearing, I'm not permitted to go around -- or in an application, I'm not permitted to go around and disclose that, that's exactly what that statute says.

So how can I direct them to do something indirectly that I can't do directly myself?

MR. LANDES: Good point. We have to read public records in para material with the statute. The statute says nothing of record, it speaks of testimony.

It speaks not of the Commission, whose obligation it is under public records to provide public records, it speaks only of employees and agents.

And it is very broad. And it says -and I'll put an ellipses in to illustrate how broad
it is; any information acquired by him in respect to
business of any public utility. So it's not

financial information, it's amazingly broad.

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So this is a prohibition on talking. If you go down to Sandman at lunchtime and you're in line at Sandman on the ground floor, you can't say guess what I just heard. That's pretty clear from this.

On the other hand, you have the public records law that says records shall be public, you two -- --

ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: You still have to get them from a PUCO employee, and the PUCO employee, under 4901.16, is precluded from disclosing.

MR. LANDES: Fair enough.

ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: We can't give you the password to our computers and say go find what you want.

MR. LANDES: But the Commission acts through its agents and acts through its employees, and has to satisfy public records law through those employees, but not through testimony, and not through speaking.

There are documents that speak for themselves. They are handed over. It is a physical transaction, not testimony, which is what is

addressed in .16. That's how I would read it in para materia.

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Any other way -- any other way to give effect to .16 in the public records arena would completely obliterate public records.

Now, the Commission has tried in these prior hearings to draw a line that seems to give some credence to both, and I appreciate that. And we win on that here.

So this is not perhaps the case to make this point, but it is fair to say that one way to read these in para materia is to say this deals with testimony, public records deals with delivery, and that's how you read them together.

We ought not have to wait until the end of the investigation at all to have a public records. They should be given over promptly as we are told, and they should be given over promptly in the future.

The concerns that they have can be dealt with in a different forum with public records as the forum, there are ways to do that.

And we would ask for an order promptly to give effect to public records law. Subject to your questions that ends my presentation.

ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: Thank you.

28 1 MR. LANDES: Thank you. 2 ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: At this time 3 we're going to deny the motion for protective order. As we have discussed repeatedly in the 4 5 arguments, the Commission has construed 4901.16 as precluding the disclosure of information prior to the 6 7 issuance of the Staff or audit report. In this case the audit report has been 8 9 filed, therefore 4901.16 will not preclude the 10 release of the information, and Staff will release 11 the information after a reasonable period of time to 12 accommodate any interlocutory appeals if they are 13 filed. 14 Anything further, Mr. Doringo? 15 MR. DORINGO: No, your Honors. 16 MR. LANDES: No, your Honor. Thank you. 17 ATTORNEY EXAMINER PRICE: Thank you. 18 With that we are adjourned. 19 (Thereupon, the hearing was 20 adjourned at 10:30 a.m.) 2.1 22 23 24

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CERTIFICATE

I do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct transcript of the proceedings taken by me in this matter on Thursday, January 17, 2019, and carefully compared with my original stenographic notes.

Valley Lywyawy)
Valerie J. Grubaugh,
Court Reporter and Notary
Public in and for the State
of Ohio.

My commission expires August 11, 2021.



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in

Case No(s). 17-0974-EL-UNC

Summary: Transcript In the Matter of the Review of the Ohio Edison Company, The Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company, and the Toledo Edison Company's Compliance With R.C. 4928.17 and the Ohio Adm. Code Chapter 4901:1-37, hearing held on January 17th, 2019. electronically filed by Mr. Ken Spencer on behalf of Armstrong & Okey, Inc. and Grubaugh, Valerie