BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF OHIO

In the Matter of the Application of Ohio)	
Power Company for an Increase in Electric)	Case No. 20-585-EL-AIR
Distribution Rates.)	
In the Matter of the Application of Ohio)	Case No. 20-586-EL-ATA
Power Company for Tariff Approval.)	
In the Matter of the Application of Ohio)	
Power Company for Approval to Change)	Case No. 20-587-EL-AAM
Accounting Methods.)	

MOTION TO REOPEN THE HEARING RECORD

Pursuant to Ohio Adm.Code 4901-1-34, Nationwide Energy Partners, LLC ("NEP") submits this Motion to Reopen the Hearing Record to allow additional testimony and evidence in this proceeding for good cause shown. As further discussed in the attached memorandum in support, the newly discovered evidence will further assist the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio ("Commission") in this proceeding. NEP further respectfully requests that, upon reopening the record, the Commission schedule a prehearing conference to discuss with all parties the appropriate procedural schedule for the presentation of the attached supplemental testimony and evidence.

Respectfully Submitted,
/s/ Michael J. Settineri

Michael J. Settineri (0073369), Counsel of Record
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MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT

I. INTRODUCTION

Through this motion, NEP seeks to reopen the record in this proceeding to allow for additional information to be presented to the Commission. Specifically, NEP intends to provide the attached supplemental testimony of Teresa Ringenbach who will identify and clarify information that was not previously available to NEP but has significant value to this proceeding and to the Commission's resolution of the issues. Specifically, the supplemental testimony establishes that AEP has "rejected" any and all construction requests submitted now and in the future by any customer of NEP, which requires additional tariff language to not only provide for a systematic process for evaluating construction requests but also to avoid undue and possibly systemic customer discrimination by the utility. AEP's recent decision to reject existing requests and preemptively deny any construction request from certain customers is new evidence that was unavailable before the record closed in this proceeding. The Commission should be allowed to review and consider this new evidence as part of its resolution of the issues surrounding AEP's construction request process in this proceeding. Accordingly, for these reasons, as set forth more fully below, good cause exists under Ohio Adm. Code 4901-1-34 to reopen this proceeding and allow for the inclusion of this additional evidence.

II. PROCEDURAL AND FACTUAL BACKGROUND

On April 9, 2020, AEP filed its Pre-Filing Notice of Intent to File for an Increase in Electric Distribution Rates, Tariff Changes, and Application for Approval of Changes in Accounting Methods with the Commission. On June 8, 2020, AEP filed its Application. Numerous parties, including NEP, filed motions to intervene, which the Commission

subsequently granted. The Commission held the hearing on this matter over five days, May 12, 13, 14, 17, and 18, 2021. The parties filed their initial briefs on June 14, 2021, and their reply briefs on July 6, 2021.

A key issue identified by NEP in this proceeding is that AEP's current construction request process is a veritable black hole that lacks transparency with no uniform, clear procedure for customers. (*See* NEP Initial Brief at 36-41.) Given this state of affairs, customers are unable to effectively plan for their construction needs. (NEP Initial Br. at 37-39.) Accordingly, NEP proposed additional tariff language to address this issue and provide greater clarity for customers. (*Id.*)

Last week on September 15, 2021, NEP representatives met with AEP representatives to discuss the status of construction requests that had to be resubmitted after the requests were purged by AEP's internal work order system. As described in Ms. Ringenbach's supplemental testimony about that meeting, AEP stated, unequivocally, that it will not approve *any* construction requests submitted by customers who have contracted with NEP. (*See attached* Suppl. Direct Test. of Teresa Ringenbach at 3.) In addition, the supplemental testimony shows this was a surprise to NEP because AEP and NEP have been discussing these properties and the start dates for construction since before the hearing in this proceeding. (*Id.* at 3).

III. LAW AND ARGUMENT

A. Standard of Review

Ohio Adm.Code 4901-1-34(A) states that "[t]he commission...may, upon their own motion or upon motion of any person for good cause shown, reopen a proceeding at any time prior to the issuance of a final order." Further, "If the purpose is to permit the presentation of additional evidence, the motion shall specifically describe the nature and purpose of such

evidence, and shall set forth facts showing why such evidence could not, with reasonable diligence, have been presented earlier in the proceeding." Ohio Adm.Code 4901-1-34(B).

B. Good Cause Exists to Reopen the Record in this Proceeding

Good cause exists to reopen the record in this proceeding because additional facts have come to light only recently that show that AEP may also use the existing closed-room process to discriminate against customers. That evidence consists of AEP statements to NEP and an AEP letter to AEP customers, all of which are described in Ms. Ringenbach's supplemental testimony and support NEP's position in this proceeding on construction requests. The evidence is intended to lead the Commission to a decision that ensures that the construction process does not allow AEP to delay projects without explanation and requires AEP to provide detailed information on how far in advance of a project start date work orders should be submitted. In addition, Ms. Ringenbach's supplemental testimony proposes tariff language that would not allow AEP to delay or reject work orders at AEP's sole discretion or on the basis of the customer's private arrangements with its contractors. A copy of Ms. Ringenbach's supplemental testimony is attached to this motion as NEP Ex. 36 and it shows the new facts and proposed tariff language.

Ms. Ringenbach's testimony and attachments constitute new evidence in this matter because the two incidents on which the supplemental testimony is based occurred after the record closed in this proceeding -- the pending requests were purged from AEP's system and AEP communicated its position to NEP that the resubmitted requests (and any future requests) would be rejected. This evidence could not have been obtained prior to the record closing, as AEP's actions here were taken only after the record closed on May 18, 2021. Accordingly, good cause exists to reopen the record and allow for the inclusion of this additional evidence into the record.

The Commission has reopened the record or allowed supplemental information in prior cases. For example, *In the Matter of the Application of Ohio Power Company to Update its gridSMART Rider*, Case No. 12-509-EL-RDR, Finding and Order at 9, the Commission accepted additional information filed after the close of the record because the additional information contradicted a claim made during the case and facilitated "a Commission decision based on the latest and best information available." NEP's request will allow the Commission to consider the pending construction request issues based on the latest and best information available, given AEP's recent handling of construction requests and new pronouncement last week.

In another case, the Commission concluded that it needed additional impact information before considering a proposed, stipulated electric security plan, ordered its Staff to present a detailed analysis and testimony, and scheduled a new day of hearing. *In the Matter of the Application of Ohio Edison Company, The Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company, and The Toledo Edison Company for Authority to Establish a Standard Service Offer Pursuant to Section 4928.143, Revised Code, in the Form of an Electric Security Plan*, Case No. 10-388-EL-SSO, Entry on Rehearing (May 13, 2010). *See also, In the Matter of the Application of Duke Energy Ohio, Inc. for an Energy Efficiency Cost Recovery Mechanism and for Approval of Additional Programs for Inclusion in its Existing Portfolio*, Case No. 11-4393-EL-RDR, Entry at ¶ 3 (March 21, 2012) (Commission desired to receive information and other filings regarding a utility's proposed rider energy efficiency/peak demand reduction rider before issuing a decision); and *In the Matter of the Long-Term Forecast Report of Ohio Power Company and Related Matters*, Case Nos. 10-501-EL-FOR, Entry at ¶ 10 (September 5, 2012) (Commission desired

¹

¹ The Commission had not yet addressed the merits of the application at the time of this Entry on Rehearing. Rehearing was sought after the Commission ruled pre-hearing on the applicants' initial waiver requests and administrative notice requests.

additional information regarding a specific project before the Commission could "reach a decision regarding the stipulation");

Lastly, inasmuch as all parties would be able to participate, there will be no harm caused by granting NEP's motion.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, for good cause shown, NEP respectfully requests that the Attorney Examiner reopen the record to allow for the presentation and consideration of the Ringenbach Suppl. Testimony attached herewith.

Respectfully Submitted,

/s/ Michael J. Settineri

Michael J. Settineri (0073369), Counsel of Record Elia O. Woyt (0074109)
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Counsel for Nationwide Energy Partners, LLC

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio's e-filing system will electronically serve notice of the filing of this document on the parties referenced on the service list of the docket card who have electronically subscribed to the case. In addition, the undersigned certifies that a courtesy copy of the foregoing document is also being served (via electronic mail) on the 21st day of September, 2021 upon all persons/entities listed below:

/s/ Michael J. Settineri

Michael J. Settineri

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BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF OHIO

In the Matter of the Application of Ohio Power Company for an Increase in Electric Distribution Rates.))	Case No. 20-585-EL-AIR
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SUPPLEMENTAL DIRECT TESTIMONY OF TERESA RINGENBACH ON BEHALF OF

NATIONWIDE ENERGY PARTNERS, LLC

September 21, 2021

1 Q1. PLEASE STATE YOUR NAME, BUSINESS ADDRESS, AND ON WHOSE

2 BEHALF YOU ARE TESTIFYING?

- 3 A1. My name is Teresa Ringenbach. I am the Vice President, Business Development with
- 4 Nationwide Energy Partners, LLC ("NEP"). My business address is 230 West Street, Suite
- 5 200, Columbus, Ohio 43215. I previously testified in this proceeding on behalf of NEP on
- 6 May 17, 2021. I am presenting supplemental testimony in this proceeding on behalf of
- 7 NEP.

8 Q2. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF YOUR SUPPLEMENTAL TESTIMONY?

- 9 A2. The purpose of my supplemental testimony is to provide additional information in support
- of NEP's proposed revisions to Section 10. EXTENSION OF LOCAL FACILITIES that
- begins on Sheet 103-5 of the proposed tariff of Ohio Power Company ("AEP") that is part
- of the Joint Stipulation and Recommendation identified as Joint Exhibit 1 in this
- proceeding.

14 Q3. WHAT IS THE ADDITIONAL INFORMATION YOU ARE PROVIDING TO THE

15 **COMMISSION?**

- A3. Since I testified in this proceeding on May 17, 2021, several relevant incidents have
- occurred. First, construction projects previously submitted to AEP on behalf of NEP's
- clients and that were pending disappeared from AEP's internal work order system. Second,
- AEP recently informed NEP that AEP will reject and deny any pending and future
- 20 construction requests by any AEP customer that is a client of NEP. This is new information
- 21 that was not and could not have been known by NEP at the time I testified previously in
- this proceeding.

1	Q4.	HOW	DID	NEP	DISCOVER	THAT	THE	PENDING	REQUESTS	HAD
2		DISAP	PEAR	ED FR	OM AEP'S IN	[TERNA]	L WOF	RK ORDER S	SYSTEM?	

- A4. On June 24, 2021, AEP informed NEP through email (attached as Attachment A) that AEP required additional information on the pending requests. NEP previously provided this information to AEP on October 16, 2020. On July 1, 2021, NEP representatives met with AEP representatives asking for an update on when AEP would commence work on the properties. During that meeting, AEP informed NEP verbally that the construction requests for the properties were no longer in AEP's internal work order system.
- 9 Q5. DID AEP PROVIDE A REASON FOR WHY THE WORK ORDERS
 10 DISAPPEARED FROM THE INTERNAL WORK ORDER SYSTEM?
- 11 A5. AEP indicated that the work orders had expired and its system purged the work orders.
- NEP was not aware that work orders had expired and were purged, nor is there any
- information in AEP's tariff or processes to inform a customer that this can occur and when
- it occurs.
- 15 **Q6. DID NEP RESUBMIT THE WORK ORDERS?**
- 16 A6. Yes, NEP resubmitted the work orders to AEP on August 10, 2021. The work orders were
- 17 resubmitted through the AEP website form found here
- 18 <u>https://www.aepohio.com/business/builders/new-business</u>. NEP also separately emailed
- the AEP representatives to let them know these were resubmitted.
- 20 Q7. DID AEP CONTACT NEP ABOUT THE WORK ORDERS AFTER THEY WERE
- 21 **RESUBMITTED?**
- 22 A7. No, NEP did not hear back from AEP. Upon being notified of this, I reached out to AEP
- to establish a date for AEP's work to begin. We set a meeting for September 15, 2021. It

- was at that meeting on September 15, 2021, that AEP representatives informed NEP that all pending work orders would be "rejected" and that future work orders for any customer that was working with NEP would also be denied.
- 4 Q8. WERE YOU SURPRISED BY AEP'S COMMUNICATION ABOUT THE
 5 PENDING AND FUTURE WORK ORDERS?
- A8. Yes. AEP and NEP have been discussing these properties and the start date for construction since before the hearing in this proceeding. AEP also sent a notice after the hearing to tenants at properties that are converting to master-metered service. I have attached the notice to my testimony as Attachment B and it gives no indication that AEP was not going forward with conversions.
- 11 Q9. WHY ARE YOU MAKING THE COMMISSION AWARE OF WHAT HAPPENED
- TO THE PENDING WORK ORDERS AND AEP'S SEPTEMBER 15, 2021
- 13 **COMMUNICATION?**
- A9. 14 I previously testified that the construction process with AEP is inefficient and that contractors do not hear back for long periods of time, that they have to escalate through 15 multiple levels of AEP employees and that they have to duplicate efforts. My supplemental 16 17 testimony today shows that that AEP may also use the existing closed-room process to discriminate against customers. NEP does not accept AEP's "rejection" of the pending 18 19 work orders and believes AEP's actions and position to be inappropriate and unlawful. 20 However, the purpose of my testimony today is to ensure that the construction process does not allow AEP to arbitrarily delay projects without a valid construction reason and an 21 22 explanation, and to ensure that the process requires AEP to provide detailed information 23 on how far in advance of a project's start date the work orders should be submitted. In

1		addition, the construction process in the tariff should clarify that AEP cannot delay or reject
2		work orders at AEP's sole discretion or on the basis of the customer's private arrangements
3		with contractors that AEP does not like.
4	Q10.	ARE YOU AWARE OF AEP PROHIBITING CONSTRUCTION ON THE BASIS
5		OF A CUSTOMER'S PRIVATE ARRANGEMENTS WITH ITS CONTRACTORS?
6	A10.	Other than the incident on September 15, 2021, I am not. However, if this has occurred in
7		the past, there would be no way to directly know because the construction process by design
8		provides no insights or formal information to a customer once submitted.
9	Q11.	DO YOU HAVE A PROPOSAL ON HOW THIS ISSUE CAN BE AVOIDED FOR
10		FUTURE CONSTRUCTION REQUESTS?
11	A11.	Yes. NEP proposes additional language (additional to that presented by NEP previously
12		in this proceeding) as shown below in bold and italicized text to Section 10. EXTENSION
13		OF LOCAL FACILITIES of the tariff attached to the Stipulation that begins on Sheet 103-
14		5. NEP's original edits to that sheet are shown in italics and again, the additional language
15		proposed is in bold and italicized text:
16 17 18 19 20		The Company shall construct suitable electric transmission and distribution facilities under this line extension policy to serve customer premises when the customer cannot be served from existing electrical facilities.
21 22 23 24		Customers or their authorized representative requesting new or expanded electric service shall submit detailed and complete information via an electronic business portal, which may will include but not be limited to a customer-customizable form for
25262728		construction requests identifying switch size, requested delivery voltage, total estimated load, listing of connected loads, operating characteristics, site survey plans (showing other utilities or underground infrastructure) and first floor elevations before the
29		Company can develop a plan of service and prepare a construction
30 31		cost estimate. The business portal will allow customers to provide, with the initial request, additional information and documents.

The Company will determine the modifications to the Company's transmission and/or distribution facilities required to provide for a basic service plan to serve the customer's load. The Company will design, construct, own, operate and maintain the line extension and all other equipment installed to serve the customer's load up to the point of service for each customer. The Company, at its discretion and where practicable, will consider alternative route designs on the customer's premises, and the customer will be responsible for the incremental costs associated with the alternative route.

Within seven days of receiving the request, the Company shall acknowledge the request and shall provide the customer or their authorized representative with the name and contact information of the Company representative who will be responsible for the construction request. Company shall update the customer every twenty days regarding the status of the construction request and associated project. Upon receipt of the necessary information from the customer, the Company will comply with Chapter 4901:1-907 of the Ohio Administrative Code and exercise its best efforts to expedite the entire process for developing a service plan and preparing a cost estimate.

The Company shall have no obligation to extend, expand or rearrange its facilities if it determines that the existing facilities are adequate to serve the customer's electrical load. The Company shall provide a detailed and reasonable explanation in writing for any delayed service request, including all requirements to cure any deficiency related to the construction of the project. The Company may not reject a request based on the use of a subcontractor or service provider by the Customer or for any reason unrelated to the physical construction requirements of the service request.

O12. DOES THIS CONCLUDE YOUR SUPPLEMENTAL DIRECT TESTIMONY?

35 A12. Yes, but I reserve the right to supplement my testimony.



Aaron Depinet <adepinet@nationwideenergypartners.com>

Coastal Properties

4 messages

Aaron Depinet <adepinet@nationwideenergypartners.com>

To: Erik M Schaas <eschaas@aep.com>, Dean H Hartzell <DHHARTZELL@aep.com>

Thu, Jun 24, 2021 at 6:48 AM

Erik and Dean, Since it seems we have the green light from AEP to move forward with these Coastal Ridge projects, I wanted to pass along the construction timing with both of you. Most of what we would need from AEP would occur in Oct/November but we are starting the construction process a little earlier on a project or two. Especially Edge at Arlington. Please let me know what you would need from me so all these can be converted in a timely manner and consistent with what was communicated to our customer. Thanks

Edge at Arlington	June 14 - July 12	30 days	3-6 hours each building
Arlington Pointe	October 18- November 22	20 days	6-8 hours each building
The Normandy	Week of October 25	5 Days	2-4 hours each building
Lofts at Norton Crossing	November 1 - November 8	5 days	2-4 hours each building
Gateway Lofts Cbus	Week of November 15	5 Days	2-4 hours each building

--

AARON DEPINET | SR. MANAGER OF FIELD OPERATIONS

TEAM MEMBER SINCE 2018

C (567) 230-2626





Dean H Hartzell dhhartzell@aep.com

To: Aaron Depinet <adepinet@nationwideenergypartners.com>, Erik M Schaas <eschaas@aep.com>

Thu, Jun 24, 2021 at 11:39 AM

Aaron,

Attached is the email exchange we had regarding what I need for Edge at Arlington and Arlington Pointe. If Hunter sent the layouts to me I did not receive them. Thanks!

Dean



From: Aaron Depinet <adepinet@nationwideenergypartners.com>

Sent: Thursday, June 24, 2021 6:49 AM

To: Erik M Schaas <eschaas@aep.com>; Dean H Hartzell <dhhartzell@aep.com>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Coastal Properties

This is an EXTERNAL email. STOP. THINK before you CLICK links or OPEN attachments. If suspicious please click the 'Report to Incidents' button in Outlook or forward to incidents@aep.com from a mobile device.

[Quoted text hidden] [Quoted text hidden] [Quoted text hidden]

-- Forwarded message ------

From: Aaron Depinet <adepinet@nationwideenergypartners.com>

To: Dean H Hartzell dhhartzell@aep.com

Cc: Hunter Strong hstrong@nationwideenergypartners.com

Bcc:

Date: Thu, 6 May 2021 20:03:59 +0000

Subject: Re: [EXTERNAL] Secondary Conversions coming up

This is an EXTERNAL email. STOP. THINK before you CLICK links or OPEN attachments. If suspicious please click the 'Report to Incidents' button in Outlook or forward to incidents@aep.com from a mobile device.

I can do that thanks. I will let Hunter know.

On Thu, May 6, 2021 at 3:59 PM Dean H Hartzell dhhartzell@aep.com wrote:

Aaron,

It would be helpful to have the apartment layout like you gave me for Bantry Bay for the Edge at Arlington and Arlington Pointe. By the way, I will have the orders for Bantry Bay on Monday and the line department and meter will coordinate schedules with Hunter. Thanks!

Dean

614-832-5974



From: Aaron Depinet <adepinet@nationwideenergypartners.com>

Sent: Thursday, May 6, 2021 12:57 PM To: Dean H Hartzell < dhhartzell@aep.com>

Subject: Re: [EXTERNAL] Secondary Conversions coming up

This is an EXTERNAL email. STOP. THINK before you CLICK links or OPEN attachments. If suspicious please click the 'Report to Incidents' button in Outlook or forward to incidents@aep.com from a mobile device.

Arlington Pointe has two buildings that are apartments that we will be converting. The Edge at Arlington on Dierker Rd would be the entire community. Let me know if we need to make trips out to these sites. Thanks

On Thu, May 6, 2021 at 9:09 AM Dean H Hartzell dhhartzell@aep.com wrote:

Good morning Aaron,

Just want to make sure of the locations.

Gateway Lofts at Dublin

The Lofts at Norton Crossing

255 and 295 E. Long Street

You have the orders for a couple of addresses on Shore Line Lane. That is part of the Arlington Pointe complex. Are you planning on all the buildings there? Also, same for the 5020 Dierker Road which is the Edge at Arlington complex. As far as I know these are the ones you sent. If you want to update me with your list that would be great. Thanks!

Dean

614-832-5974



From: Aaron Depinet <adepinet@nationwideenergypartners.com>

Sent: Monday, May 3, 2021 1:28 PM

To: Dean H Hartzell < dhhartzell@aep.com>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Secondary Conversions coming up

This is an EXTERNAL email. STOP. THINK before you CLICK links or OPEN attachments. If suspicious please click the 'Report to Incidents' button in Outlook or forward to incidents@aep.com from a mobile device.

Last year I sent you a bunch of properties that want to switch submetering to NEP. We visited one of those called The Normandy together. All of those projects are a go and we are hoping to get all 100% done this year. So I was wondering, do we need to set up a meeting together to go through all of these? We still need site visits for the remainder. Start dates for all conversions will be Oct/November. Let me know. Thanks

AARON DEPINET | SR. MANAGER OF FIELD OPERATIONS

TEAM MEMBER SINCE 2018

C (567) 230-2626

AARON DEPINET | SR. MANAGER OF FIELD OPERATIONS

TEAM MEMBER SINCE 2018

C (567) 230-2626

Aaron Depinet Senior Manager of Field Operations NEP | Nationwide Energy Partners P (567) 230-2626 NationwideEnergyPartners.com

Re: [EXTERNAL] Secondary Conversions coming up.eml

Aaron Depinet <adepinet@nationwideenergypartners.com>

To: Dean H Hartzell < dhhartzell@aep.com> Cc: Erik M Schaas <eschaas@aep.com>

Thu, Jun 24, 2021 at 11:49 AM

Mon, Jun 28, 2021 at 1:53 PM

Dean, see attached for Edge at Arlington. I'm reaching out to the property for Arlington Pointe. I will get that to you asap. Thanks [Quoted text hidden]

[Quoted text hidden]







EdgeatArlington_sitemap.pdf

105K

Aaron Depinet <adepinet@nationwideenergypartners.com>

To: Dean H Hartzell < dhhartzell@aep.com>

Cc: Erik M Schaas <eschaas@aep.com>

Dean, see attached for Arlington Point apartments. Please note we are only metering the apartments not the condos. Let me know if you need anything else. We are starting to install equipment this week at Edge at Arlington. Let me know if you need to visit that site. Thanks

[Quoted text hidden]

2 attachments



Arlington Pointe Site Map JPG



Arlington point addresses.xlsx

11K

ATTACHMENT B



AEP Ohio 700 Morrison Road Gahanna, OH 43230 AEPOhio.com

IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT ELECTRIC PROVIDER



July 16, 2021

Dear

We value your business as an AEP Ohio customer. Unfortunately, our records indicate that there is a request for a sub-metering company to take over your electric service and we wanted to make you aware that your account with AEP Ohio will be closed out. If you currently participate in any of the AEP Ohio programs, such as PIPP, Neighbor to Neighbor, LHEAP, Emergency Rental Assistance, outage alerts, online account management, the AEP mobile app or other programs, please be aware that these will also end after your account is closed.

If you have any questions about your new service, contact your landlord. If you have questions about the landlord's right to change your service from AEP Ohio to a sub-metering company, please contact the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) at 800-686-7826.

We are disappointed to lose you as a valued customer and hope to serve you again in the future.

Sincerely,

Angie Rybalt

Anxie Rybert

Director, Customer Experience

Stay Connected With Us!



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Commission of Ohio Docketing Information System on

9/21/2021 9:26:07 AM

in

Case No(s). 20-0585-EL-AIR, 20-0586-EL-ATA, 20-0587-EL-AAM

Summary: Motion Motion to Reopen the Hearing Record electronically filed by Mr. Michael J. Settineri on behalf of Nationwide Energy Partners, LLC