

BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF OHIO

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In the Matter of the :
 Application of Columbia :
 Gas of Ohio, Inc., for :
 Authority to Amend its :
 Filed Tariffs to Increase : Case No. 21-637-GA-AIR
 the Rates and Charges for :
 Gas Services and Related :
 Matters. :

In the Matter of the :
 Application of Columbia :
 Gas of Ohio, Inc., for : Case No. 21-638-GA-ALT
 Approval of an Alternative:
 Form of Regulation. :

In the Matter of the :
 Application of Columbia :
 Gas of Ohio, Inc., :
 Approval of a Demand Side : Case No. 21-639-GA-UNC
 Management Program for its:
 Residential and Commercial:
 Customers. :

In the Matter of the :
 Application of Columbia :
 Gas of Ohio, Inc., for : Case No. 21-640-GA-AAM
 Approval to Change :
 Accounting Methods. :

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PROCEEDINGS

before Mr. Gregory Price, Attorney Examiner, and Ms.
 Jenifer French, Chairperson, at the Whetsone Park
 Shelter House, 3901 North High Street Columbus, Ohio,
 called at 6:00 p.m. on Thursday, June 9, 2022.

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APPEARANCES:

NiSource
By Mr. Joseph M. Clark
290 West Nationwide Boulevard
Columbus, Ohio 43215

On behalf of the Applicant.

Bruce J. Weston, Ohio Consumers' Counsel
By Ms. Angela D. O'Brien,
Assistant Consumers' Counsel
65 East State Street, Suite 700
Columbus, Ohio 43215

On behalf of the Residential Consumers of
Columbia Gas of Ohio.

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1 Thursday Evening Session,
2 June 9, 2022.

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4 EXAMINER PRICE: Let's go on the record.
5 Good evening. The Public Utilities
6 Commission of Ohio has set for hearing at this time
7 and place Case No. 21-637-GA-AIR, et al., being in
8 the Matter of the Application of Columbia Gas of
9 Ohio, Inc., for Authority to Increase Rates and
10 Related Matters.

11 My name is Gregory Price. I am the
12 Administrative Law Judge assigned to preside over
13 tonight's hearing. With me is the Chair of the
14 Commission, Jenifer French.

15 We would like to begin by taking
16 appearances starting with the Company.

17 MR. CLARK: Thank you, your Honor.
18 Joseph M. Clark on behalf of Columbia Gas of Ohio.
19 Thank you.

20 EXAMINER PRICE: OCC.

21 MS. O'BRIEN: Good evening, your Honor.
22 On behalf of the Office of the Ohio Consumers'
23 Counsel, Bruce Weston, Ohio Consumers' Counsel,
24 Angela O'Brien, Assistant Consumers' Counsel, 65 East
25 State Street, Suite 700, Columbus, Ohio 43215.

1 EXAMINER PRICE: Thank you.

2 Any other Intervenors here care to make
3 an appearance?

4 I would also like to point out in the
5 back of the hall are members of the Public Utilities
6 Commission of Ohio Staff. If you have any questions
7 regarding tonight's proceeding or regarding this
8 case, they have prepared a fact sheet you can look at
9 and take home. I will mention this later, there are
10 directions on here to file written comments in the
11 proceeding or download a copy of the Staff Report and
12 Recommendation.

13 The subject of today's hearing is an
14 application filed by Columbia Gas on June 30 of 2021
15 for approval to increase rates and for approval of an
16 alternative rate plan. The Commission Staff filed a
17 Report of Investigation on April 6, 2022. This
18 Report of Investigation is a recommendation only and
19 does not necessarily reflect the final determination
20 to be made in this case.

21 The purpose of today's public hearing is
22 to receive testimony about the application from the
23 public affected by the proposed rates. Therefore,
24 tonight's public hearing is an opportunity for you to
25 let the Commission know what you think about the

1 application. Tonight's public hearing is only one
2 aspect of the process in this case. We will be
3 holding an evidentiary hearing on July 13, 2022, at
4 the Commission offices.

5 Tonight's hearing is being transcribed by
6 a court reporter. If you plan to testify, please
7 speak clearly so the court reporter can accurately
8 reflect your comments on the record. If you prepared
9 a written statement, please provide a copy to the
10 reporter.

11 Each person who signed up may present
12 sworn testimony about the application. I will swear
13 in each witness, and I will ask you to state your
14 name and address for the record. If anybody is
15 uncomfortable stating your home address, please feel
16 free to skip that portion.

17 The parties in this case are permitted to
18 ask you questions regarding your testimony. I would
19 like to point out that the Chair and Commission will
20 judge the merits of this application; therefore,
21 neither the Chair nor I can answer any questions this
22 evening regarding the application. As I stated
23 earlier, the Staff prepared a fact sheet, and a full
24 copy of the application and Staff Report is available
25 online.

1 Once again, I would like to reiterate
2 this hearing is an opportunity for you to let the
3 Commissioners know what you think about the
4 application. The testimony you give tonight will be
5 part of the official record in this case and will be
6 reviewed by the Commission before they make a
7 decision.

8 If you decide you do not want to testify
9 when we read your name tonight, please feel free to
10 pass to the next witness. If you decide you would
11 prefer to file written testimony with the Commission,
12 the fact sheet describes how to file your comments.
13 We don't have a huge crowd tonight, but we would ask
14 each witness limit their testimony to roughly 5
15 minutes, please.

16 With that we will take the first witness.

17 CHAIR FRENCH: I apologize in advance if
18 I pronounce your name incorrectly. All right? But,
19 first, we have Ashley Thomas.

20 MS. THOMAS: Abbey.

21 EXAMINER PRICE: Do you want to come up?
22 We have a microphone up here.

23 (Witness sworn.)

24 EXAMINER PRICE: Please state your name
25 and address for the record.

1 MS. THOMAS: My name is Abbey Thomas. I
2 work for Ohio Energy Project. Address is 200 East
3 Wilson Bridge Road in Worthington, Ohio 43085.

4 EXAMINER PRICE: Please proceed.

5 MS. THOMAS: Good evening. My name is
6 Abbey Thomas. I am representing Ohio Energy Project,
7 a nonprofit here in Columbus. I am here tonight to
8 speak to Ohio Energy Project's long-time partnership
9 with Columbia Gas of Ohio.

10 But before I begin, I would like to share
11 a little more about Ohio Energy Project for those in
12 this room who may not have heard of the organization.
13 Ohio Energy Project, or OEP, is a nonprofit serving
14 the entire State of Ohio in all things energy
15 education. Primarily engaging students, teachers,
16 and their communities, OEP provides science-based,
17 standards-aligned curriculum focused on energy
18 literacy, leadership, and efficiency. We've been
19 working with classrooms in all 88 counties of Ohio
20 since 1988, but our blockbuster program, e3 Smart,
21 which stands for Energy Efficiency Education, really
22 took off in 2011, multiplying our impact tenfold.

23 What is so special about e3 Smart is not
24 only its ability to engage students in hands-on
25 science education in the classroom but also its

1 ability to put textbook learning into real-life
2 action out in our communities. Through a
3 comprehensive curriculum, supplemental lab supplies,
4 and home efficiency energy kits, e3 Smart empowers
5 teachers, students, and their communities to take
6 action when it comes to energy efficiency in their
7 lives. And OEP is able to provide all of this, the
8 curriculum, the equipment, the kits, the ongoing
9 school year support, to schools and communities at no
10 cost thanks to our partners like Columbia Gas of
11 Ohio.

12 And not only have these partnerships
13 allowed us to serve tens of thousands of learners
14 across the state every year, but also they have
15 afforded us the opportunity to continuously grow as a
16 trusted education organization. Because of the --
17 because of the support we receive, we are annually
18 able to refine and expand our programs, like e3
19 Smart, updating our lessons and materials to meet the
20 needs of classrooms and learners every year. Every
21 classroom is different. And every learner is not the
22 same. It is through the generous support of our
23 partners that we are able to best serve our bright
24 young minds with programs that meet them where they
25 are and help them to achieve their learning goals.

1 OEP believes supporting education in our
2 communities is critical to addressing the challenges
3 of our future. And school budgets should not be
4 barriers to science. They should not be barriers for
5 the bright young minds poised to lead Ohio's future.
6 That is why OEP and partners like Columbia Gas of
7 Ohio make it a priority to serve typically
8 under-resourced districts in our work. With the
9 partnerships with districts from Columbus City
10 Schools to Toledo Public Schools and so many in
11 between, OEP works to ensure our learners are
12 equipped to not only understand energy but also to
13 take action to mitigate their own impact and even
14 save their families money along the way.

15 Just this year a participating Columbus
16 City School teacher from Easthaven Elementary shared
17 that through implementing e3 Smart in her classroom
18 she actually saw her students get excited about
19 science. They even went so far as to tell her they
20 love science. And that's something that this teacher
21 had never seen before, not before implementing the e3
22 Smart.

23 It's through that excitement, through
24 that passion for science that we inspire the next
25 generation to carry the mantle of this work to be the

1 energy workers, leaders, thinkers, and innovators of
2 tomorrow and to help move Ohio forward into an even
3 brighter future.

4 We thank our partners at Columbia Gas of
5 Ohio for their continued support of this work and
6 their investment in their communities impacting tens
7 of thousands of young scientists each and every year
8 and inspiring our future in energy efficiency
9 education. Thank you.

10 CHAIR FRENCH: Cynthia Marshall.

11 MS. O'BRIEN: Excuse me. Is there going
12 to be an opportunity for questions?

13 EXAMINER PRICE: Yes. Please.

14 MS. O'BRIEN: Just a quick question. My
15 name -- thank you very much for coming, providing
16 your testimony today, first of all. My name is
17 Angela O'Brien. I am counsel with Ohio Consumers'
18 Counsel, and I was just curious as to whether or not
19 Ohio Energy Project supports the \$212 million
20 proposed rate increase by Columbia Gas?

21 MS. THOMAS: If I could answer that I am
22 just on behalf of our Executive Director who is not
23 here due to sickness so I am just kind of
24 representing her so I'm not sure how to answer that
25 at this time. I'm sorry.

1 MS. O'BRIEN: Okay. And just briefly one
2 more question about the e3 Smart program. If that
3 program was supported by money coming from the
4 supercharges, how would you feel about that?

5 MS. THOMAS: Again, I would want to lean
6 on her just as like an education coordinator and
7 trying to step up to the plate. I would have her
8 respond. I'm sorry, so I can't answer that.

9 MS. O'BRIEN: Okay. Thank you very much
10 for your testimony.

11 EXAMINER PRICE: Okay.

12 CHAIR FRENCH: Cynthia Marshall.

13 EXAMINER PRICE: Ms. Marshall.

14 (Witness sworn.)

15 EXAMINER PRICE: Please state your name
16 and address for the record.

17 MS. MARSHALL: Okay. Good evening. My
18 name is Cynthia Marshall. My home address is 2830
19 Lymington Road, Columbus, 43220. I am here this
20 evening representing Children's Hunger Alliance, the
21 health and human service nonprofit where I am
22 employed as the Vice President of Development.

23 Children's Hunger Alliance is an
24 organization that's a 501(c)(3) founded in 1970 as a
25 regional health and human services agency with a

1 mission to get meals to children to address the need
2 for the insecure food that children across Ohio are
3 experiencing, a very vulnerable population of food
4 insecurity. During our third decade of existence, we
5 expanded to be a statewide organization to magnify
6 getting meals to children experiencing food
7 insecurity in areas outside of central Ohio. We
8 distribute USDA nutritionally balanced meals to
9 children that live in a home environment of
10 50 percent poverty or higher. These are the same
11 children in school that qualify for free or reduced
12 lunch and breakfast, if breakfast is provided in
13 their school.

14 Our work consists of ad -- excuse me.
15 Our work consists of advocacy for these school meal
16 programs, along with year-round distribution of meals
17 to the same children in after school care programs,
18 and especially for their breaks such as weekends,
19 holidays, and summer recess when they are separated
20 from the meals they receive each day during school.

21 Since the early 2000s, our work has
22 included a focus on nutritious meals assistance to
23 in-home care providers and childcare centers across
24 Ohio. Our work with these mostly women-owned, small
25 businesses involves helping increase the nutritional

1 value through the food they provide to children in
2 their daily care. Registered dieticians that are
3 part of our staff help us do all of the work that I
4 have just described to you.

5 For 18 years, Columbia Gas has been an
6 outstanding partner to our important work to get
7 healthy meals for food insecure children. During
8 that 18-year partnership, it has grown in depth and
9 breadth to support our mission in a variety of ways
10 among the programs that we annually implement to
11 serve Ohio's children living with food insecurity.

12 Some of the following examples will share
13 some content about how the depth and breadth of our
14 relationship and our partnership has grown: A member
15 of the leadership team of Columbia Gas has been
16 actively involved in our governance and advocacy on
17 our Central Regional Board.

18 Columbia Gas has provided an investment
19 to help us secure and expand our infrastructure to
20 meet the skyrocketing need for meals during the early
21 months of the pandemic.

22 They have invested in ongoing annual
23 funds to help us purchase food to pack and distribute
24 meals that meet the USDA standards to get the most
25 food to insecure children.

1 Partnering with Columbia Gas in 2021 on a
2 five-figure investment providing us the ability to
3 distribute meals, on behalf of the Company, to
4 children living in the food insecurity, and
5 specifically in northeast and southeast regions of
6 Ohio. These two regions, particularly hit hard by
7 the economic consequences of the pandemic,
8 experienced a significant growth in children's food
9 insecurity. Columbia Gas wanted to be our funding
10 partner in this endeavor to help these children
11 receive the meals in these geographic areas.

12 Columbia Gas associates have participated
13 in a number of group sessions where they have come to
14 our warehouse to pack meals to get meals distributed
15 across Ohio.

16 And, finally, there's been robust
17 attendance by the community -- excuse me, the Company
18 leaders at the events that we hold annually to
19 highlight not only our work but to underscore the
20 need to continue a standing and to incorporate
21 partnerships across Ohio to feed children
22 experiencing food insecurity in our state. Thank
23 you.

24 EXAMINER PRICE: Ms. O'Brien.

25 MS. O'BRIEN: Thank you very much for

1 your testimony tonight. And I have the same
2 question. Does Ohio Children's Hunger Alliance
3 support the 212 million proposed rate increase by
4 Columbia Gas?

5 MS. MARSHALL: Officially I can't answer
6 that because I am not the Executive Director. I am
7 in her shoes. She is out of town, so I can't -- I
8 can't speak for the organization. I'm sorry.

9 MS. O'BRIEN: Okay. Thank you for your
10 testimony.

11 CHAIR FRENCH: Charles Gehring.

12 (Witness sworn.)

13 EXAMINER PRICE: Please state your name
14 and address for the record.

15 MR. GEHRING: If you don't mind, I'm
16 going to stand up here so my back is not to you.

17 EXAMINER PRICE: No.

18 MR. GEHRING: I feel bad about that.

19 My name is Charles Gehring. I am a
20 lifelong resident of Franklin County. I won't say
21 how many years that is. And for the past 21 years, I
22 have been the President and CEO of LifeCare Alliance.
23 LifeCare Alliance is a 124 year old nonprofit agency
24 which serves seniors and medically challenged
25 individuals through nutrition and healthcare. We are

1 best known for our Meals-on-Wheels program, but we
2 also serve our clients through the Columbus Cancer
3 Clinic, the Central Ohio Diabetes Association,
4 nursing, wellness centers, and home care.

5 The bottom line is that at LifeCare
6 Alliance, we provide basic needs, critical services
7 to those most in need. This means that we also pay
8 large numbers of rents and utility shutoffs for
9 people most in need and often in their hour of
10 greatest need.

11 For many years Columbia Gas has been a
12 strong partner of ours to ensure that those most in
13 need in central Ohio do not lose their utility
14 service in their time of greatest need and greatest
15 stress.

16 We often encounter local clients who have
17 not been able to keep their utility bills current due
18 to major life events, employment layoffs, or serious
19 illnesses, and they are forced to decide whether they
20 can purchase food, medications, or pay their rents or
21 utilities. As you can imagine, food, medicine, and
22 housing are paid, and must be paid, prior to paying
23 utility bills. However, their home utilities,
24 especially gas, which is used to heat their homes and
25 cook their food, is just as critical to their lives

1 and critical to keeping them and their families out
2 of a homeless situation from which they may never
3 recover.

4 Columbia Gas does not turn off our
5 client's gas service, even when they are months or a
6 year or two behind in payments. Columbia Gas works
7 with us to ensure this critical utility remains on
8 when they have hit a bump in their road. Columbia
9 Gas understands when we contact them and are always
10 willing to discuss the person's situation. Gas
11 remains on while we assist with utility payments and
12 while the person battles cancer or other serious
13 illnesses -- sorry, no podium -- finds a new job, or
14 gets their family back on their feet without going
15 into a devastating homeless situation.

16 In addition, Columbia Gas has partnered
17 with our agency to ensure our clients have safe
18 housing. Recently they provided hundreds of carbon
19 monoxide detectors which Columbia Gas personnel and
20 our staff installed in the homes of our clients and
21 local residents. While delivering our
22 Meals-on-Wheels, we often encounter gas issues in
23 homes due to outdated heating systems making these
24 detectors critical.

25 Columbia Gas associates for years have

1 donated their lunch breaks to deliver Meals-on-Wheels
2 in our local communities and volunteer their off
3 hours to work in our pantry and facilities to assist
4 those in need.

5 Columbia Gas has been and remains a
6 strong and valued partner as we serve those most in
7 need.

8 Thank you.

9 EXAMINER PRICE: Ms. O'Brien.

10 MS. O'BRIEN: Just one quick question.
11 First of all, thank you for providing your testimony
12 today. How do you think that Columbia's proposed
13 increases in fixed charges will affect elderly
14 consumers who are on extremely fixed incomes?

15 MR. GEHRING: Well, nobody likes rate
16 increases, and nobody can handle more money
17 sometimes. However, we encounter -- who we work with
18 most of the time are people that are way behind in
19 their bills, and the question there becomes is the
20 gas on or is it not on. And so we've got to have a
21 solution to that. And my understanding is there have
22 been no rate increases for Columbia Gas for 14 years.
23 And, you know, everything we have right now at our
24 agency is a higher cost, and at some point we have
25 got to take care of those most in need, the weakest

1 link in the chain, and that's the people that don't
2 have gas.

3 MS. O'BRIEN: And so does your
4 organization support the 212 proposed -- \$212 million
5 proposed rate increase?

6 MR. GEHRING: We support Columbia Gas and
7 all that they do in the community here, and it's like
8 a circle of life from the Lion King movie. It starts
9 and ends and sometimes those who are most in need are
10 the most -- they are the weakest link in our chain.
11 We have got to take care of those in our community,
12 and we have got to be able to keep their gas on.

13 MS. O'BRIEN: So your organization does
14 support the proposed rate increase.

15 MR. GEHRING: I already answered that
16 question. Thanks anyway.

17 MS. O'BRIEN: Okay. Thank you very much.

18 EXAMINER PRICE: Thank you.

19 CHAIR FRENCH: Okay. Stephanie Harris.

20 EXAMINER PRICE: Ms. Harris.

21 (Witness sworn.)

22 EXAMINER PRICE: Please state your name
23 and address for the record.

24 MS. HARRIS: Hello, everyone. My name is
25 Stephanie Harris. I am Senior Vice President for

1 Resource Development for United Way of Franklin
2 County and United Way of Central Ohio. We have
3 actually expanded.

4 So you've heard today from some of the
5 organizations that United Way supports. You've heard
6 from Chuck. You've heard from Children's Hunger
7 Alliance. These are the organizations that are
8 supported in our community by United Way of Central
9 Ohio.

10 The resources for our support come from
11 our community partners. There is no bigger partner
12 for United Way than Columbia Gas of Ohio. They have
13 been our partner for more than 20 years contributing
14 millions of dollars that go directly to support low
15 income people, low income families, low income
16 individuals through some of the organizations that
17 you've heard from today.

18 Our goal is to provide for basic needs in
19 our community. So we are helping thousands of people
20 through our nonprofit partners every year find
21 housing, access to food, access to quality medical
22 care, keep their lights on, keep their utilities on,
23 all of those things. And all of that support comes
24 from organizations and corporate partners like
25 Columbia Gas of Ohio.

1 And most -- most recently we conducted a
2 campaign. It was called United for Impact. In that
3 campaign we raised in just a week's time more than
4 \$670,000 that went directly to our nonprofit
5 partners. Columbia Gas was our lead sponsor in that
6 effort.

7 Without Columbia Gas and the
8 contributions from its employees, from its leaders
9 who have helped to lead our organization on
10 government committees, on volunteer efforts, on
11 raising funds to support our nonprofit partners, we
12 would not be able to do the kind of work we do. We
13 would not be able to support the 93 organizations --
14 the 93 nonprofit organizations that are supporting
15 low income children, low income families, providing
16 school success for kids, helping those kids to
17 achieve the things that they need to achieve to be
18 successful in elementary school, in high school,
19 helping to support the early childhood education
20 programs across our community that are preparing
21 students for success in school.

22 That's the kind of partnership that we
23 have with Columbia Gas. They are the organization,
24 the corporation that we can call on for all of those
25 kinds of supports, financial supports, leadership for

1 our organization, and leadership for our
2 community-wide efforts. They are a constant partner.
3 They have been for, as I said, more than 20 years,
4 and I am sure they will continue to be that partner
5 that we can rely on to help us to support all of our
6 nonprofit partners and the low income families,
7 children, and seniors and individuals that they
8 serve. Thank you.

9 EXAMINER PRICE: Thank you.

10 Ms. O'Brien.

11 MS. O'BRIEN: Yes. Thank you for
12 providing your testimony this evening. Do you
13 believe that the funds that support the nonprofit
14 organizations that you mentioned, do you believe that
15 those funds should be recovered from the consumers?

16 MS. HARRIS: Well, what I believe is very
17 much like what Chuck said. I believe that we support
18 Columbia Gas. I think that every organization, every
19 corporation at some point or another needs to raise
20 additional funds. It has been some 14, almost 15
21 years since Columbia Gas had a rate hike.

22 Without that kind of support from
23 Columbia Gas, without that kind of infrastructure,
24 that is the kind of infrastructure that helps to
25 support the HEAP programs. It helps to keep

1 utilities on. That helps support the winter crisis
2 programs. All of those are part of the
3 infrastructure that's needed to support those people
4 in our community who have the least, and our
5 corporate partners are part of that strategy.

6 Columbia Gas, as I have said, has been a
7 partner of ours for more than 20 years. We are
8 approaching our 100th year in 2023. And I am sure
9 Columbia Gas will be a major supporter of our
10 100-year growth as they have been in all of the past
11 years. So their efforts to support the community,
12 I'm sure, will be supported. Their efforts to raise
13 additional funds, a large portion of that will come
14 exactly back to the community, come to us, come to
15 our community partners at -- at the outreach to help
16 low income people, low income seniors, low income
17 children and families.

18 MS. O'BRIEN: And the people who -- I
19 think you said the people who have the least, do you
20 think that they would benefit from just lower gas
21 rates?

22 MS. HARRIS: I think that the people who
23 are the -- who are -- who need the help the most are
24 really people whose utilities have been shut off, in
25 many cases whose utilities are being threatened, in

1 many cases who don't have the resources to pay their
2 utility bills.

3 Regardless of what the situation, in many
4 cases regardless of what the rate would be, they
5 still would not have the resources to pay utility
6 bills. These are the folks that our nonprofit
7 organizations like LifeCare Alliance are helping.
8 These are the people who -- like Legal Aid Society of
9 Columbus is another one of our nonprofit
10 organizations. These are the kinds of organizations
11 and these are the people that need the help the most.
12 Without some additional support from Columbia Gas,
13 those folks, those organizations would not be in a
14 position to help those people who need it most.

15 MS. O'BRIEN: So is it fair to say United
16 Way supports the \$212 million proposed rate increase
17 by Columbia Gas?

18 MS. HARRIS: I think it's fair to say
19 United Way supports Columbia Gas in all of its
20 efforts to support the low income people.

21 MS. O'BRIEN: Thank you.

22 CHAIR FRENCH: Okay. Matthew Gansen.

23 MR. GOLDSTEIN: Goldstein.

24 CHAIR FRENCH: Wow. I got that wrong.

25 MR. GOLDSTEIN: That's my handwriting.

1 (Witness sworn.)

2 EXAMINER PRICE: Please state your name
3 and address for the record.

4 MR. GOLDSTEIN: Matthew Goldstein. I am
5 with Besa, and our address is 966 South High Street,
6 Columbus, Ohio 43206.

7 EXAMINER PRICE: Please proceed.

8 MR. GOLDSTEIN: Hi. My name is Matthew
9 Goldstein. I am the founder and CEO of Besa. We are
10 a Columbus-based nonprofit. Everything we do is
11 civic engagement. We work to try to figure out how
12 to help educate community members around needs and
13 then activate them within those needs. That's
14 hunger. That's housing. That's senior welfare.
15 That's animal welfare.

16 We started in 2012 and got 56 volunteers
17 engaged in the community with a couple hundred hours
18 of service, and since then we have grown to about
19 60,000 volunteers giving back 150 hours of service
20 and over \$50 million primarily to the central Ohio
21 community.

22 Columbia Gas of Ohio is one of our
23 strongest corporate partners, and they have been one
24 of our strongest corporate partners since inception
25 of Besa.

1 Let me give you a couple of examples.
2 During the pandemic and the darkest days of the
3 pandemic, Columbia Gas was the first -- one of the
4 first companies to come to our door and say how can
5 we help, Besa? How can we show up? And they gave us
6 a \$25,000 grant so that we could mobilize more people
7 to the front lines to help keep food pantries open and
8 expand their hours, to show up at the shelters, and
9 to help vulnerable seniors.

10 But it's not just the money they gave to
11 us. It's also the people from Columbia Gas that
12 showed up on the front line. They were showing up at
13 the food pantries. They were showing up at the
14 homeless shelters, and they were showing up at our
15 project that supported vulnerable seniors.

16 In fact, it's 270 volunteers from
17 Columbia Gas in the deepest, darkest moment of the
18 pandemic that showed up giving over 200,000 hours
19 back to our community. And in the five years that
20 Columbia Gas has been a partner with Besa, 1,500
21 employees have given over 11,000 hours back to this
22 community.

23 Columbia Gas is a strong corporate
24 partner not just to Besa but to many nonprofits and
25 community organizations across this community, and we

1 are proud to stand here and support Columbia Gas as a
2 community partner. Thank you.

3 EXAMINER PRICE: Thank you.

4 MR. GOLDSTEIN: Does this do anything?

5 EXAMINER PRICE: It's working.

6 MS. O'BRIEN: Thank you for your
7 testimony, first of all. You mentioned the funds
8 that Columbia Gas provides to you. Do you believe
9 that those funds should be recovered from the very
10 consumers you serve?

11 EXAMINER PRICE: Ms. O'Brien, do you have
12 a good faith basis to ask a question that funds are
13 being recovered from the rate base?

14 MS. O'BRIEN: I am asking him what his
15 belief is.

16 EXAMINER PRICE: I'm asking you do you
17 have a good faith basis to believe that the funds are
18 being recovered?

19 MS. O'BRIEN: Yes. As a matter of fact,
20 I do, your Honor, because certain of Columbia's
21 programs are, in fact, recovered through rates. For
22 example, the WarmChoice program is recovered through
23 base rates.

24 EXAMINER PRICE: Okay.

25 MR. GOLDSTEIN: I was actually going to

1 say that. I don't know exactly where the funds come
2 from, if they are recovered or given within the
3 Columbia Gas corporation. What I do know is that
4 Columbia Gas shows up and provides impact in this
5 community through the investment they make both in
6 terms of dollars they give and how their employees
7 help this community.

8 MS. O'BRIEN: Certainly volunteer work by
9 Columbia Gas is -- is laudable. So would it be fair
10 to say that your agency supports the \$212 million
11 proposed increase by Columbia Gas?

12 MR. GOLDSTEIN: We support Columbia Gas
13 in all the ways they help this community, support
14 people and all of this community, particularly the
15 most vulnerable.

16 MS. O'BRIEN: Okay. And the most
17 vulnerable paying increased gas rates?

18 MR. GOLDSTEIN: I'm sorry?

19 MS. O'BRIEN: You support the most
20 vulnerable people in the city paying increased gas
21 rates.

22 MR. GOLDSTEIN: I can't speak to that,
23 but what I can speak to is how Columbia Gas is that
24 strong community partner and how they show up in this
25 community with the nonprofits that have already

1 spoken, with our nonprofit, assuming other nonprofits
2 across this community. We cannot do this work
3 without Columbia Gas.

4 MS. O'BRIEN: Thank you very much.

5 MR. GOLDSTEIN: Thank you.

6 CHAIR FRENCH: Okay. Our last witness,
7 Melissa Garler.

8 MS. GARVER: Garver, same issue for me.
9 (Witness sworn.)

10 EXAMINER PRICE: Please state your name
11 and address for the record.

12 MS. GARVER: Melissa Garver, 355 East
13 Campus View Boulevard, Suite 250, Columbus, Ohio
14 43235.

15 EXAMINER PRICE: Please proceed.

16 MS. GARVER: Good evening. My name is
17 Melissa Garver from the Community Shelter Board. I'm
18 pleased to be here this evening in support of
19 Columbia Gas as a community partner.

20 Community Shelter Board leads the
21 community response to homelessness. Columbia Gas has
22 a proven track record for being an incredible
23 community partner. They have partnered with us at
24 the Community Shelter Board since 1999, and I want to
25 share three examples of their community impact.

1 First, their charitable investments.
2 Columbia Gas has made a charitable investment in the
3 Community Shelter Board every year since 1999. These
4 investments are significant, and they mean that more
5 people facing homelessness in our community find the
6 support they need to have a place to call home. Most
7 recently Columbia Gas has funded something called
8 permanent supportive housing to ensure housing
9 stability for some of our most vulnerable neighbors.
10 Permanent supportive housing ends homelessness for
11 people experiencing long-term homelessness in coping
12 with mental health challenges, addiction, or chronic
13 illness.

14 Financial support from Columbia Gas
15 ensures that more than 2,000 vulnerable people remain
16 safely housed. Ensuring housing stability is a
17 proven measure for individual health and essential
18 for economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

19 Secondly, their utility hardship
20 assistance. Through their partnership Columbia Gas
21 promotes their energy assistance programs with people
22 being served in our housing programs making a
23 conservative effort to reach more people who may be
24 struggling to pay their bills. We worked together
25 last year to create and distribute door hangers

1 offering utility assistance to hundreds of
2 households.

3 And, third, their leadership expertise.
4 A senior leader from Columbia Gas has served on the
5 Board of Trustees for the Community Shelter Board for
6 many years. Having this kind of talent and
7 engagement at the board room table helps improve our
8 strategic progress toward a community where everyone
9 has a place to call home. Thank you.

10 EXAMINER PRICE: Ms. O'Brien.

11 MS. O'BRIEN: Thank you.

12 EXAMINER PRICE: Thank you.

13 Thank you for your time.

14 EXAMINER PRICE: That is all the people
15 who have signed up but as I indicated earlier, if
16 anyone cares to offer testimony at this time even if
17 you have not signed up, please feel free to come
18 forward.

19 No. You don't have to sign up.

20 (Witness sworn.)

21 EXAMINER PRICE: Please state your name
22 and address for the record.

23 MR. GLANDORF: Thank you. Is this on?

24 EXAMINER PRICE: I think so.

25 MR. GLANDORF: My name is Joseph

1 Glandorf. I live at 1601 Roxbury Road, Apartment A.
2 In addition to being a Columbia Gas ratepayer, I am
3 also a member of Sunrise Columbus, a youth climate
4 justice organization, but I am here as an individual
5 today.

6 I notice there are a lot of people here
7 refusing to state their position on this rate
8 increase, but I don't do that. But I wonder did they
9 come here on their own accord, or did Columbia ask
10 them to? In speaking just for myself, I can attest
11 to you without this \$30 rate increase, Columbia Gas
12 is already my highest utility expense by far.

13 At least a third and usually more of this
14 charge is fixed charges for delivery or program
15 riders dedicated to pay for Columbia's pet projects
16 totally uncorrelated to my actual use of gas. I did
17 not choose whatever these projects are, and I don't
18 see why they are so valiantly needed we need a
19 massive rate increase.

20 The Ohio Consumers' Counsel seems to
21 think they aren't stating, I quote, Columbia's
22 proposed rate increase of \$212 million is about
23 \$202 million too high. And since I haven't heard
24 this before at this hearing yet today, this is an
25 increase of the average consumer's bill by about

1 27 percent per month. Yet these charges keep coming
2 year by year.

3 And now they are going up at a time when
4 we are already being crushed by inflation. Whose
5 pockets is this money lining? This is only happening
6 because Columbia Gas is a profit-seeking private
7 corporation in a monopolistic market, unaccountable
8 to its ratepayers, which has been licensed to operate
9 on a long leash by state regulators Columbia probably
10 worked to buy off. And you have already seen how
11 this can happen here in Ohio with FirstEnergy's
12 scandal. According to the Ohio Capital Journal in
13 2021 moreover, the Political Action Committee of
14 Columbia's parent company NiSource made nearly
15 \$150,000 in expenditures in Ohio state political
16 races.

17 If it were my choice, I would want a
18 publicly-owned democratically run utility which
19 actually cares about its ratepayers and answers to
20 their needs rather than profit-seeking greed. And I
21 would also want this utility to work towards phasing
22 out natural gas entirely. As part of a green energy
23 transition, we need fully electrified appliances all
24 because of the contribution of natural gas to the
25 climate crisis which threatens a liveable future on

1 this planet, not to mention the harm that's caused by
2 fracking.

3 But for a start we can shut down this
4 harmful rate increase plan and pursue the path of the
5 advocate by the Ohio Consumers' Counsel. Shame on
6 Columbia Gas. Thank you for your time.

7 EXAMINER PRICE: Thank you.

8 MR. GLANDORF: Thank you.

9 (Witness sworn.)

10 EXAMINER PRICE: Please state your name
11 and address for the record.

12 MS. REESE: My name is Bernita Reese. I
13 am here for the City of Columbus Recreation and Parks
14 Department. I definitely want to represent the City
15 as far as our Department and the partnership that we
16 have with Columbia Gas. And that is we currently
17 have over 400 parks, 36 pollinator gardens, 22
18 community centers, and more. We have several other
19 amenities and that's pools and different -- you are
20 sitting in a shelter house, and then you look out the
21 door and you see the garden.

22 A lot of this is because of the
23 partnership we have with Columbia Gas. They
24 volunteer with us throughout the year. That
25 volunteerism comes with planting of trees. It comes

1 with removal of trees whenever there are storms and
2 ice within our City.

3 And then another thing that happens is
4 sometimes when there are gas lines and leakages
5 within the City, we are often called on and that is
6 how we partner, and those individuals are placed
7 within our community centers making sure that our
8 partnership within the Columbia Gas company have
9 shelter for those individuals.

10 Something else that's also provided and
11 that is young people that cannot afford programming
12 within the Recreation and Parks Department, they have
13 an opportunity to still participate within programs
14 and that's through our Play Scholarship program.
15 They provide over \$20,000 to that particular program.
16 We actually work with them diligently throughout the
17 year to make sure that those children are provided
18 opportunities.

19 And in our Forestry Master Plan, and that
20 is planting trees, this year alone we had 400 trees
21 that were planted during the March month. And that
22 is Columbia Gas came out and planted -- staff from
23 that organization came out and planted with us. So
24 we appreciate them for coming out.

25 Our partnership not only lingers into the

1 nature plan of things but then also something else
2 that they gave dollars to is scholarship funding.
3 But then the other part of it is Adopt -- Adopt Our
4 Programs and that is they come in during
5 Thanksgiving. They provide meals. So those dollars
6 are able to provide meals to a lot of families who
7 cannot afford meals during the Thanksgiving period.

8 But then also our Christmas months they
9 Adopt a Center. And during those Christmas months,
10 those children and families that cannot afford maybe
11 some holiday festivities, they come in and provide an
12 Adopt a Center and provide toys, and they provide
13 gloves and provide winter wear for those families
14 during that time.

15 So we appreciate Columbia Gas, their
16 actual partnership with us, and we are here on behalf
17 of Columbus Recreation and Parks. Thank you.

18 EXAMINER PRICE: Thank you.

19 (Witness sworn.)

20 EXAMINER PRICE: Please state your name
21 and address for the record.

22 MS. PINTO: Tiffany Pinto, 940 Norris
23 Drive, 43224.

24 EXAMINER PRICE: I'm sorry. Did you get
25 her name?

1 COURT REPORTER: It was a little fast.

2 MS. PINTO: Tiffany Pinto.

3 COURT REPORTER: Pintell?

4 MS. PINTO: Pinto like a bean. Tiffany
5 Pinto like a bean, 940 Norris Drive. And I've heard
6 a lot of 503s that I think do good work in our
7 community support an organization that may do good
8 work in our community but is not servicing our
9 community in the right way. I contribute to some of
10 these organizations, and as a ratepayer, I will have
11 less money in my disposable income to support these
12 organizations.

13 I can do good work in our community. I
14 also have spent the last two years working through
15 mutual aid to knock on doors of people who are facing
16 eviction. 600 people a week in Franklin County face
17 eviction every week. Thousands of doors, we have
18 knocked on their doors and tried to connect them with
19 various assorted methods of assistance. We have not
20 gotten the support. I do not believe the support for
21 those people facing eviction is out there for them
22 through these organizations like the Shelter
23 Community Board because people -- large corporations
24 decide what philanthropic institutions or endeavors
25 they choose regardless of what democratic policy

1 should be endeavored by our politicians who are
2 democratically elected.

3 I do not support this rate hike as a
4 ratepayer. I do not support this rate hike as a
5 member of this community. And I do not support this
6 rate hike as a person who has tried for the last two
7 years to help people who are facing eviction connect
8 with services that are unavailable because the funds
9 are not there in the Statehouse because they go to
10 support -- I don't have any idea what they go to, but
11 it's certainly not people who are facing a desperate
12 need for these services.

13 And 400 trees is not a sufficient number
14 of trees to save us from global climate change
15 catastrophe that is going to come as a result of
16 using all the natural gas. I do not support this.

17 EXAMINER PRICE: Thank you.

18 Anybody else care to speak? Thank you.

19 CHAIR FRENCH: All right. Thank you all
20 for being here. It's very important for us to hear
21 what everyone has to say. This is a very important
22 part of the process. We very much appreciate you
23 taking the time to come out and give us your
24 thoughts, your testimony. Thank you for that.
25 Everyone have a great evening.

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EXAMINER PRICE: Thank you.

With that we are adjourned. Let's go off
the record.

(Thereupon, at 6:43 p.m., the hearing was
adjourned.)

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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, June 9, 2022,
and carefully compared with my original stenographic
notes.

Karen Sue Gibson, Registered
Merit Reporter.

(KSG-7293)

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Case No(s). 21-0637-GA-AIR, 21-0638-GA-ALT, 21-0639-GA-UNC, 21-0640-GA-AAM

Summary: Transcript June 9th 2022 In the Matter of the Application of Columbia Gas of Ohio, Inc., for Authority to Amend its Filed Tariffs to Increase the Rates and Charges for Gas Services and Related Matters. In the Matter of the Application of Columbia Gas of Ohio, Inc., for Approval of an Alternative Form of Regulation. In the Matter of the Application of Columbia Gas of Ohio, Inc., Approval of a Demand Side Management Program for its Residential and Commercial Customers. In the Matter of the Application of Columbia Gas of Ohio, Inc., for Approval to Change Accounting Methods. electronically filed by Mr. Ken Spencer on behalf of Armstrong & Okey, Inc. and Gibson, Karen Sue Mrs.