

**BEFORE
THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF OHIO**

In the Matter of the Application of)
Columbia Gas of Ohio, Inc., for) Case No. 21-637-GA-AIR
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) 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., for) Case No. 21-639-GA-UNC
Approval of a Demand Side)
Management Program.)

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

**PREFILED TESTIMONY IN RESPONSE TO OBJECTIONS TO THE
STAFF REPORT**

OF

**JAMES T. RIPKE
RATES AND ANALYSIS DEPARTMENT
PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF OHIO**

STAFF EXHIBIT ____

November 9, 2022

1 1. Q. Please state your name and business address.

2 A. My name is James (Jim) Ripke and my business address is 180 East
3 Broad Street, Columbus, Ohio 43215.

4
5 2. Q. By whom and in what capacity are you employed?

6 A. I am employed by the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO or
7 Commission) as a Utility Specialist in the Rates and Analysis
8 Department.

9
10 3. Q. Please briefly describe your educational and professional background.

11 A. I have a Bachelor of Arts degree from The Ohio State University. I
12 received a Bachelor of Science degree from Franklin University.

13
14 I have been employed with the PUCO since 1999. I initially started in the
15 Service Monitoring and Enforcement Division's (SMED) call center, receiving
16 complaints on utility company practices and services. As a Customer Service
17 Investigator, I would liaison with utility company representatives in an attempt
18 resolve issues brought by consumers.

19
20 In 2010, I was promoted to Utility Specialist 1, where a majority of work
21 assignments have dealt with natural gas companies. My primary focus of
22 responsibility is the Demand Side Management (DSM) programs of Columbia
23 Gas of Ohio, Inc., (Columbia or Company), Vectren Energy Delivery of Ohio,
24 Inc. d/b/a CenterPoint Energy Ohio (CenterPoint), and The East Ohio Gas

1 Company d/b/a Dominion Energy Ohio.

2
3 My work includes reviewing applications for renewal, changes in rider rates, and
4 auditing program spending.

5
6 4. Q. What is the purpose of your testimony in this proceeding?

7 A. The purpose of my testimony is to address objections raised regarding the
8 Demand Side Management (DSM) program in Columbia Gas of Ohio,
9 Inc's. (Columbia or Company) distribution rate case. Specifically, I
10 address Environmental Law & Policy Center (ELPC) Objection 1,
11 Citizens' Utility Board of Ohio (CUB Ohio) Objection 2, and Ohio
12 Partners for Affordable Energy (OPAE) Objections 1 and 2.

13
14 5. Q. ELPC Objection 1, OPAE Objection 2, and CUB Ohio Objection 2 all
15 object to the recommendations to deny annual inflation-based budget
16 increases and cap annual spending to the DSM program. How do you
17 respond?

18 A. Each year, Columbia submits an application to the Commission for an
19 adjustment to its DSM rider rate. In its Application, Columbia includes
20 documentation indicating annual program budgets and spending that
21 occurred throughout the calendar year. Staff reviewed the Company's
22 previous DSM budgets and program spend and found that, historically,
23 Columbia's programs have not fully spent the projected budgets. They,

1 nevertheless, have been successful in meeting their targeted annual energy
2 savings. Staff believes that the total amount of funding proposed in the
3 Stipulation should ensure an adequate amount of overall funding. For
4 these reasons, Staff, consistent with the Stipulation, does not think
5 Columbia's budget should contain an annual two percent increase, and
6 budgets should be capped to 2022 spending levels.

7
8 6. Q. OPAE Objection 1 and CUB Ohio Objection 2 both object to the
9 recommendation to transfer \$7.1 million in WarmChoice© funding from
10 base rates to the DSM rider. How do you respond?

11 A. Staff does not agree that transferring \$7.1 million from base rates to the
12 DSM rider will place the program at risk. The transfer of low-income
13 energy efficiency funds from base rates to a rider has been approved for
14 another natural gas utility in the past and Staff has not seen any negative
15 impact to its low-income programs.¹ Moreover, Columbia has a long
16 history of support for low-income energy efficiency program funding and
17 Staff expects the Company to continue its commitment. Staff also
18 believes that moving the WarmChoice© funding from base rates to the
19 DSM Rider ultimately removes risk from rate payers by providing access
20 to annual rider audits and providing flexibility to the program in between
21 rate cases. Finally, in addition to the \$7.1 million, the Stipulation provides

¹ *In the Matter of the Application of Vectren Energy Delivery of Ohio, Inc. for Approval of an Increase in Gas Rates*, Case No. 18-298-GA-AIR, Opinion and Order (August 28, 2019).

1 Columbia access to additional funding available in the DSM Rider for
2 WarmChoice©, which Staff believes should ensure an adequate amount
3 of overall funding.

4
5 7. Q. CUB Ohio Objection 2 and ELPC Objection 1 both claim that the Staff
6 recommendations to the DSM Rider violate state policy in R.C. 4905.70
7 and R.C. 4929.02(A)(12)? Do you agree?

8 A. No. In the Stipulation, the signatory parties agreed to certain DSM Rider
9 terms. Staff believes that the Stipulation would be consistent with the
10 policies raised in the respective objections were the Stipulation approved
11 by the Commission. Staff believes that the Stipulation represents a fair
12 and reasonable compromise of issues raised among the signatory parties
13 and supports the Stipulation.

14
15 8. Q. Does this conclude your testimony?

16 A. Yes. However, I reserve the right to submit supplemental testimony as
17 new information subsequently becomes available or in response to
18 positions taken by other parties.

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

The undersigned hereby certifies that a true and correct copy of the **Pre-filed Testimony of James T. Ripke in Response to Objections to the Staff Report** has been served upon the below-named counsel via electronic mail, this 9th day of November, 2022.

/s/ Werner L. Margard

Werner L. Margard

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AAM**

Summary: Testimony Of James Ripke electronically filed by Ms. Tonnetta Y. Scott
on behalf of PUC