

Prepared Testimony of

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Commissioner Nominee
Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission

Before the

Pennsylvania Senate
Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure Committee

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Thank you, Chairman Stefano, Chair Boscola, and members of the Senate Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure Committee. I am Kimberly Barrow. Thank you for your time today and for your consideration of my nomination to the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission.

I wish to thank Governor Shapiro for the nomination and for his confidence in me.

Over the past months, so many Senators opened their doors to meet with me and we discussed issues important to them and their constituents. If confirmed, I pledge to return the favor by ensuring that I am available to you and the utility customers in your Districts.

My path here today may sound a bit different from recent PUC nominees because I've spent virtually my entire career, twenty-two years, working as a staff attorney at the Public Utility Commission. Aside from some valuable early experiences – as a Law Clerk for the Workers' Compensation Appeal Board in Harrisburg, and a brief stint doing contract work for firms in New York and New Jersey – I have been receiving on-the-job training to be a Public Utility Commissioner at the PUC.

In 2001, I began my career at the Commission as a staff attorney in the Office of Special Assistants, working on a little bit of everything across all utility industries. I practiced administrative regulatory law and worked on cases involving electricity, water, and gas distribution; common carrier and railroad safety; and telecommunications services. I prepared reports, final orders, and statutory interpretations; drafted recommendations to the Commission; and investigated appeals of Administrative Law Judge decisions to advise the Commission on how to move forward. In short, I worked on the everyday routine matters that are integral to the PUC's quasi-judicial legal process.

Throughout my career at the Commission, I was fortunate to gain exposure to the broad spectrum of utility customers. An early such experience was my service as legal counsel to the Pennsylvania Telecommunications Relay Service Board, made up of consumers who are deaf, hard of hearing, and have speech and language disorders.

Beginning in 2008, I served as Chief of Staff in the Office of Commissioner Wayne Gardner, providing legal advice on cases litigated before the PUC, drafting statements of policy, and advising on utility legislation affecting the PUC.

For the past ten years, I have served in the same role, Chief of Staff, for a well-known Senate staff alum, PUC Chairman Gladys Brown Dutrieuille.

It was through my work with Commissioner Gardner and Chairman Dutrieuille that I have had the privilege to hone what I call a focus on consumers.

Whether we call them consumers, customers, constituents, or ratepayers – I understand that they need to have reliable and affordable utility service, and I will continue to focus on those needs if I am fortunate enough to be confirmed as a Commissioner.

The high-profile utility issues before the General Assembly and before the Commission today – issues involving reliability, affordability and the overall energy burden on consumers, pipeline safety, competitive wholesale and retail energy markets, cybersecurity, aging infrastructure, electric grid modernization, severe weather events, railroad safety and even EV charging – these are not new issues to me. I have worked on these issues for the past twenty years. And I would like to bring my focus on consumers to each of these issues as the next Public Utility Commissioner.

The mission of the PUC is to balance the needs of consumers and utilities; ensure safe and reliable utility service at reasonable rates; protect the public interest; educate consumers to make independent and informed utility choices; further economic development; and foster new technologies and competitive markets in an environmentally sound manner.

Achieving that balance is easier said than done. But my life's work has been spent on reaching for that balance and on carrying out that mission. I also accept that I will be one of five independent Commissioners on an independent Commission. If confirmed, I will work with my four colleagues – Vice Chairman DeFrank, Commissioner Yanora, Commissioner Zerfuss and Commissioner Coleman – to balance our various regulatory approaches and diverse leadership styles so that we can productively and efficiently oversee this vital Commission that touches every Pennsylvanian.

I am experienced in working with a diverse group of stakeholders – consumers; utility executives; government officials; PJM, our regional transmission organization; and commissioners and staff from other states and countries. Achieving that balance between the needs of consumers and utilities is difficult, but as a veteran PUC employee, as an attorney and as a mother, I am up to that challenge of balancing important competing interests. I already do that every day.

For all of the Senators who I've had the privilege to sit down with, you will recall that I spoke of my dual priorities, affordability and reliability. These two priorities are what matter to ratepaying customers, and I will keep my focus on them.

Finally, I understand the Commission's role is to operate within the bounds of the statutory authority laid out in Title 66. I look forward to implementing the laws crafted by this body, the House, and signed by the Governor, with the efficiency, attention to detail, and with the technical and legal prowess that I know the talented and dedicated staff of the PUC will assist me in providing.

Thank you again for this opportunity. I look forward to working with you, your staff members, and your constituents. I am available to answer your questions today and, if confirmed, in the months and years ahead.

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