

Prepared Testimony of
Ralph V. Yanora
Commissioner, Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission
before a hearing of the
Pennsylvania Senate Consumer Protection &
Professional Licensure Committee

September 17, 2024



Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission
400 North Street
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17120
Telephone (717) 787-4301
<http://www.puc.pa.gov>

Good morning, Chairman Stefano, Chairwoman Boscola, and honorable members of the Senate Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure Committee. My name is Ralph Yanora. I come before you as a nominee to serve a second term as Commissioner at the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (PUC or Commission). Thank you for the great honor and privilege to sit here before you; to answer your questions; and to seek your support and approval for my renomination as Commissioner. Thank you, Senator Flynn, for your kind introduction. I also wish to thank Governor Shapiro for his nomination and Senate Leadership for their support. Additionally, I appreciate the support of PUC Chairman DeFrank and the PUC Commissioners. Lastly, I thank my family for their unwavering support.

I reside in Pittston Township, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania with my wife Carmela and my daughter Christina. I have more than 40 years of experience in the water, wastewater, natural gas and, more recently, stormwater industries. I am a licensed Master Plumber, and a certified instructor and trainer who has been recognized by the American Society of Sanitary Engineers for my work safeguarding water treatment systems. Further, I am an associate member of the Pennsylvania Rural Water Association, a statewide organization that supports its approximately 1,100 municipal utility members along with all water and wastewater operators in the Commonwealth.

As a PUC Commissioner, I have worked to ensure public safety, utility affordability, and the protection and balancing of the interests of residential, commercial, and industrial utility customers. Also key is the appropriate regulation of utility-supported economic growth and the attendant jobs our citizens require. I am working to achieve a Commonwealth energy strategy that proves an enduring success for all citizens. An example is my work to expand the proven carbon and energy cost reduction benefits of integrating retrofit hydropower technology into our

Commonwealth's water, wastewater, and stormwater utility management infrastructure. There are many opportunities for carbon and cost reduction in the plant and distribution systems of our water utilities. At the 2023 meeting of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC), where I serve as Co-Vice Chair of the Committee on Water, I moderated a panel consisting of utilities, the U.S. Department of Energy, and current Pennsylvania hydropower stakeholders to highlight successful examples of retrofit hydropower in Pennsylvania and to explore the potential of retrofit hydropower as a distributed energy resource throughout the nation. This effort culminated in a unanimous NARUC resolution supporting this effort on a national basis. My work continues with state and federal legislative discussions on how Pennsylvania may develop market-based support for the technology itself and Pennsylvania's considerable hydropower technology manufacturing base.

Regarding public safety, while retired for some time, my experience as a licensed master plumber and skilled utility trades professional provides the Commission with a diverse perspective on the critical issues of utility safety, infrastructure replacement and repair, and on the conditions and requirements skilled trade employees need to keep light, heat, and water readily available to all citizens. For example, in 2021, I produced a Commission-sponsored webinar for use as a public training program on the practical need and legal requirement to protect potable water distribution systems from inadvertently introduced contaminants and pollutants. NARUC adopted this training aid as a technical panel at its 2022 national meeting. Also, based on my field experience, in late 2022, I initiated a Fire Protection Policy Statement to develop compliance guidelines to ensure that utility fire protection service offerings are safe, reasonable, and adequate. This Fire Protection Policy Statement was unanimously adopted by the Commission on December 21, 2023.

Regarding the Commission's operations, I am working to promote the timely review of regulatory applications at the PUC to support Pennsylvania's economic growth and competitive standing among states. I have focused my efforts on encouraging the Commission to provide accurate and timely responses to application requests regardless of whether approved or denied. The Commission regulates real-world businesses with goals, deadlines, and expenses. Examples of these initiatives include: (1) initiating a rulemaking to streamline service territory applications for large water and wastewater service providers in good standing; (2) ensuring the Commission adopts efficient, consistent, and non-duplicative regulations for approving the accelerated replacement of lead water lines by regulated public utilities in harmony with the regulations of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and our sister agency, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection; and (3) requiring general process improvement initiatives and efficiencies at the Commission.

Regarding utility affordability, I am working to ensure that our most vulnerable populations are supported, and that regulated utility service is available on an equitable basis to all utility customers. Recently, I worked to ensure that Pennsylvania would obtain additional federal dollars in Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) funding. In my role as Co-Vice-Chair of the NARUC Committee on Water, I voted to approve two resolutions urging permanent federal funding for the LIHWAP program. I also continue to support the expansion of voluntary low-income assistance programs for water and wastewater utility customers and have worked with my fellow Commissioners to find balanced customer assistance programs to protect all regulated electric and natural gas customers throughout the Commonwealth.

I am proud of my prior and ongoing efforts to ensure safe, adequate, and reliable utility service throughout our Commonwealth which is the Commission's core mission. I believe my background and experience benefit the PUC and help inform the decisions I make as a Commissioner. The challenges we face over the next several years are complex and require a nuanced understanding and sophisticated balancing of all stakeholder interests. I look forward to continuing to serve and protect the Commonwealth's utility customers while finding the appropriate balance between the needs of these consumers with those of the regulated utilities.

I understand that I am being considered as one of five independent Commissioners at an independent regulatory commission and pledge to work constructively with my colleagues. I further understand that the General Assembly sets utility policy and passes laws that the Commission must implement. Please know that should I be confirmed as Commissioner, I am eager to hear from you on any of your interests.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you. I ask for your support of my nomination and I am happy to answer your questions.