

Prepared Testimony of

*John F. Coleman Jr.*

Commissioner Nominee  
Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission

Before the

Pennsylvania Senate  
Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure Committee

Presented: October 18, 2022

Good morning, Chairman Tomlinson, Chairwoman Boscola, and honorable members of the Senate Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure Committee. I am John Coleman, and I am grateful for this opportunity to appear before you and seek your support for my confirmation to the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (PUC or Commission). I want to thank my home Senator, Senate President Pro Tempore Corman, for his support.

I would like to begin by stating the obvious, in case this feels like déjà vu... I have had the privilege now of coming before this Committee four times since 2010, having been nominated to the Commission by three different governors — Governors Edward G. Rendell, Tom Corbett, and Tom Wolf. I thank Governor Wolf for his recent nomination and Senate Leadership for their support.

Additionally, I wish to thank PUC Chairman Gladys Brown Dutrieuille and Commissioner Ralph Yanora for their support in selecting me as the most recent Vice Chairman of the Commission – a role I served from October 2021 through September 2022. I also served as Vice Chairman from 2011 to 2015.

I also serve as a member of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC) Committee on Gas and as an inaugural member of NARUC's Pipeline Safety Committee. I co-chaired NARUC's Natural Gas Access and Expansion Task Force. I chair the Gas Technology Institute Public Interest Advisory Committee and serve on the Pennsylvania Energy Development Authority Board of Directors.

I also am very proud of serving as a Board Member of the Organization of PJM States or OPSI from 2013 to 2017. OPSI is a regional partnership among 14 state regulatory agencies with jurisdictions in the service area of PJM, which operates the high-voltage electric transmission grid and wholesale electricity market.

Prior to joining the PUC, my career primarily focused on community and economic development. I served 12 years as the President and CEO of the Chamber of Business and Industry of Centre County and the Centre County Industrial Development Corporation.

A reason why I sought to come before this esteemed Committee so many times is I am proud of what we have accomplished:

- Successfully advocating for legislation, Act 50 of 2017, to enhance enforcement of the PA One Call Law to reduce the number of “hits” on underground utility infrastructure and better safeguard the public through the creation of a Damage Prevention Committee.
- Emphasizing consumer education on safe digging and delaying the start of non-essential home digging projects to enhance safety and avoid disruption of utility services.
- Leading the implementation planning for the PUC reorganization, ensuring the appropriate structure to assume new responsibilities under Act 11, Act 13, Act 65 and Act 127.
- Modernizing regulations to eliminate barriers for qualified transportation carriers.
- Enhancing natural gas expansion pilot projects.
- Improving the safety and reliability of utility service.
- Promoting improvements to aging utility infrastructure through Act 11 of 2012.
- Calling on utility CEOs to identify and assist utility customers struggling with energy bills and encourage consumers to #CallUtilitiesNow.

Please know that as a Commissioner I will continue to do everything in my power to support the PUC’s mission to balance the needs of consumers and utilities to 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.

Further, I understand that the General Assembly sets the policy and passes laws that the Commission is responsible for implementing. I also understand that I am being considered as one of five independent commissioners at an independent regulatory commission.

A reason why I sought to come back before this esteemed Committee upon the expiration of my most recent five-year term is that there are important matters remaining to accomplish. I will outline just three of my future priorities today:

- Leading a PUC One Call Working Group to support the reauthorization of Act 50 of 2017, officially the “Underground Utility Line Protection Law,” which sunsets in 2024. My fellow Commissioners designated me to lead our effort to retain this important enforcement authority. Every time an underground utility line is hit, there is a risk to life and property. The PUC remains committed to upholding the standards of Act 50 and making Pennsylvania safer.
- Ensuring the Commission continues to be structured in the best way to accomplish our mission. The work we do is very important, and it touches every Pennsylvanian. The utilities and other entities who directly serve Pennsylvania consumers depend on the PUC for timely decisions. As we near the end of baseball season, we as regulators need to “keep our eye on the ball” and make sure our important work gets done, on time, on behalf of utility customers.
- Keeping a close eye on energy suppliers to make sure everyone is following the rules in our competitive marketplace. At a recent Public Meeting, I gave a final warning to retail energy suppliers to make sure they are following the rules of engagement with Pennsylvania’s energy consumers. I said that I hope the supplier community pays heed to this, and this is a final warning on unacceptable behavior in the competitive marketplace.

If I am fortunate enough to receive your support and the support of the full Senate for the confirmation of my nomination, I look forward to discussing these important issues – as well as any concerns from you or your constituents – in the years ahead.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you. I ask for your support of my confirmation and will be glad to answer any questions you may have.