

# **The PUC's Complaint Process**

## **Introduction**

The PUC has well defined procedures to process customer complaints against the utilities it regulates. There is a fairly good handbook describing the options: [LINK](#). Much of what follows comes from that guide.

Generally the PUC wants customers to attempt to settle complaints directly with the utility via their customer service organizations. In some cases that is required. If that fails or is not viable, the PUC offers two types of complaints - Informal and Formal.

## **Informal Complaints**

*Per the handbook noted above: "...you can file an Informal Complaint through the PUC's Bureau of Consumer Services (BCS). After you file the Informal Complaint, a BCS representative will work with you and the company to resolve the problem. ... In the Informal Complaint, you will have to tell us about your problem. After receiving an Informal Complaint, a BCS representative will look at the information you provided and the facts about your case. The BCS representative will also get in touch with the company to give it a chance to respond to your concerns. BCS will then issue a decision to you and the company."*

There are appeal options if you are not satisfied with the result.

## **Formal Complaints**

My two complaints were formal complaints. Filing a Formal Complaint sets in motion a well defined legal process:

#1 - Of course, a form is involved and you must fully state your complaint. My consumption volume complaint was quite involved and ran 42 pages. For the physical filing there are both electronic and overnight delivery options. Email and fax are not accepted.

#2 - When the PUC receives a complaint, it is assigned a docket number for tracking purposes and an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) to oversee the case. The complaint is then sent to the utility for a reply. The utility also has the option of working with the customer to settle the complaint.

#3 - The utility has 20 days to reply. It can also raise a "New Matter". This is generally reasons the complaint should be thrown out.

#4 - If a "New Matter" is raised, the customer has 20 days to respond. If the customer does not respond, the PUC can make a decision without a hearing.

#5 - Other filings can be made to raise various issues.

#6 - If the complaint has not been resolved, the ALJ will schedule a hearing where each party can "make their case" and cross examine each other.

#7 - Based on the evidence presented, the ALJ will issue an "Initial Decision". If it is not contested, the "Initial Decision" generally becomes final.

#8 - If you think the ALJ has made a legal error, you can file "Exceptions" to the "Initial Decision". This is essentially an appeal to the PUC Commissioners. If "Exceptions" are filed, the other party can file a reply. Other filings can also be made, but are less common.

#9 - The Commission will review the "Initial Decision" based on the "Exceptions" and issue a final "Opinion and Order".

#10 - If you do not like the final "Opinion and Order", you can file an appeal with the Commissioners. However, it has to be based on some form of new information not previously considered.

#11 - At this point the decision of the PUC is final. The only remaining alternative is to file an appeal with Pennsylvania's Commonwealth Court – which is what happened with my trucking complaint.