

BEFORE THE TENNESSEE PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

September 24, 2019

IN RE:

PETITION OF SONTARA OLD HICKORY, INC.)
FOR APPROVAL OF AN ASSET PURCHASE)
AGREEMENT AND FOR THE ISSUANCE OF A)
CERTIFICATE OF CONVENIENCE AND)
NECESSITY)

DOCKET NO.
19-00071

ORDER GRANTING THE PETITION TO INTERVENE FILED BY THE
CONSUMER ADVOCATE

This matter is before the Hearing Officer of the Tennessee Public Utility Commission (“Commission” or “TPUC”) to consider the *Petition to Intervene* filed by the Consumer Advocate Unit in the Financial Division of the Office of the Attorney General (“Consumer Advocate”) on August 22, 2019.

RELEVANT BACKGROUND

On August 14, 2019, Sontara Old Hickory, Inc. (“Sontara”) filed its *Expedited Petition of Sontara Old Hickory, Inc. for Approval of an Asset purchase Agreement and for the Issuance of a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity* (“*Petition*”). Sontara seeks to purchase water and wastewater system owned by E.I. du Pont de Nemours and Company (“DuPont”) and to provide water and wastewater services to Du Pont’s three (3) current industrial customers on the DuPont campus.¹

¹ *Petition*, p. 1 (August 14, 2019).

CONSUMER ADVOCATE'S *PETITION TO INTERVENE*

On August 22, 2019, the Consumer Advocate filed a *Petition to Intervene* seeking to intervene in the docket pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. § 65-4-118, which qualifies the Consumer Advocate to represent the interests of Tennessee consumers of public utility services in proceedings before the Commission. The Consumer Advocate maintains “[t]he interests of consumers may be affected by determinations and orders made by TPUC with respect to (A) the interpretation, application and implementation of Tenn. Code Ann. § 65-5-103(a) and other relevant statutory and regulatory provision, and (B) the review and analysis of the Company’s documentation, financial spreadsheets, and materials.”² Further, the Consumer Advocate asserts that only by participating in this docket can it adequately represent the interests of Tennessee consumers.³ Sontara does not oppose the Consumer Advocate’s *Petition to Intervene*.

FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

Tenn. Code Ann. § 4-5-310 establishes the following criteria for granting petitions to intervene:

- (a) The administrative judge or hearing officer shall grant one (1) or more petitions for intervention if:
 - (1) The petition is submitted in writing to the administrative judge or hearing officer, with copies mailed to all parties named in the notice of the hearing, at least seven (7) days before the hearing;
 - (2) The petition states facts demonstrating that the petitioner's legal rights, duties, privileges, immunities or other legal interest may be determined in the proceeding or that the petitioner qualifies as an intervenor under any provision of law; and
 - (3) The administrative judge or hearing officer determines that the interests of justice and the orderly and prompt

² *Petition to Intervene*, p. 3(August 22, 2019).

³ *Id.*

conduct of the proceedings shall not be impaired by allowing the intervention.

(b) The agency may grant one (1) or more petitions for intervention at any time, upon determining that the intervention sought is in the interests of justice and shall not impair the orderly and prompt conduct of the proceedings.⁴

Although it is not an automatic or absolute right to participate in proceedings before the Commission, Tenn. Code Ann. § 65-4-118(b)(1) provides a general basis for the qualification of the Consumer Advocate to be permitted to intervene as a party to represent the interests of Tennessee public utility consumers. It provides as follows:

The consumer advocate division has the duty and authority to represent the interests of Tennessee consumers of public utilities services. The division may, with the approval of the attorney general and reporter, participate or intervene as a party in any matter or proceeding before the commission or any other administrative, legislative or judicial body and initiate such proceeding, in accordance with the Uniform Administrative Procedures Act, compiled in title 4, chapter 5, and the rules of the commission.⁵

Because granting the *Petition* will result in a change of service provider and establishing rates and operating regulations for DuPont's customers, the Hearing Officer finds that there is a sufficient factual basis to find that the legal rights or interests held by those consumers may be determined in this proceeding.

THEREFORE, upon due consideration, the Hearing Officer concludes that the legal rights, duties, privileges, immunities or other legal interest of Tennessee consumers may be determined in this proceeding. Further, the Hearing Officer finds that the Consumer Advocate qualifies under law as an intervenor for the purpose of representing those consumer interests, there is no opposition to its intervention, and its *Petition to Intervene* was timely-filed and should not impair the interests of justice or the orderly and prompt conduct of the proceedings. For these reasons,


⁴ Tenn. Code Ann. § 4-5-310(2015).

⁵ Tenn. Code Ann. § 65-4-118(b)(1)(2015).

the Hearing Officer concludes that the Consumer Advocate's *Petition to Intervene* should be granted.

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED THAT:

The *Petition to Intervene* filed by the Consumer Advocate Unit in the Financial Division of the Office of the Attorney General is granted. The Consumer Advocate Unit in the Financial Division of the Office of the Attorney General may intervene and participate as a party in this proceeding and, as such, shall receive copies of any notices, orders, or other documents filed herein.


Monica Smith-Ashford, Hearing Officer