

**BEFORE THE TENNESSEE PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION**

**NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE**

**March 5, 2021**

<b>IN RE:</b>	)	
	)	
<b>PETITION OF ATMOS ENERGY CORPORATION</b>	)	<b>DOCKET NO.</b>
<b>FOR APPROVAL OF ITS 2021 ANNUAL RATE</b>	)	<b>21-00019</b>
<b>REVIEW FILING PURSUANT TO TENN. CODE</b>	)	
<b>ANN. § 65-5-103(d)(6)</b>	)	

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**ORDER GRANTING THE PETITION TO INTERVENE FILED BY THE  
CONSUMER ADVOCATE**

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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 February 24, 2021.

**RELEVANT BACKGROUND**

Atmos Energy Corporation (“Atmos” or the “Company”) is a natural gas public utility regulated by the Commission and provides service to approximately 152,000 residential, commercial, and industrial customers in Tennessee. In Docket No. 14-00146, the Commission approved Atmos’s Annual Review Mechanism Tariff (“ARM”). Consistent with its ARM tariff, Atmos filed its *2021 Tennessee Annual Rate Review* (“*Petition*”) on February 1, 2021 requesting Commission approval of the *Petition*, the proposed tariff, and supporting schedules. Atmos’s *Petition* seeks an increase in rates from customers of \$7,896,570 and approval to deviate from the methodologies established in the *Stipulation and Settlement Agreement* approved by the Commission in Docket No. 14-00146.

## CONSUMER ADVOCATE'S *PETITION TO INTERVENE*

On February 24, 2021, 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 the:

interests of consumers, including without limitation the proposed increase in rates to be paid by consumers under the Petition, may be affected by determinations and orders made by the Commission with respect to (i) the interpretation, application, and/or implementation of Tenn. Code Ann. § 65-5-103(a), Tenn. Code Ann. § 65-5-103(d), and other relevant statutory and regulatory provisions, (ii) the review and analysis of the documentation, financial spreadsheets, and materials provided by Atmos Energy, and (iii) the interpretation, application, and/or implementation of the terms and conditions of the Commission's Orders in TPUC Docket Nos. 14-00146, 15-00089, 16-00013, 16-00105, 17-00012, 17-00091, 18-00067, 18-00097, 18-00112, and 19-00076, as well as the related settlement agreements as applicable in those Dockets.”<sup>1</sup>

Further, the Consumer Advocate asserts that only by participating in this docket can it adequately represent the interests of Tennessee consumers.<sup>2</sup> Atmos 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

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<sup>1</sup> *Petition to Intervene*, pp. 2- 3 (February 24, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at 3.

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 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.<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup>

If the *Petition* is approved, the rates paid by consumers will be increased and the method for calculating rates in the future will be impacted. Consequently, 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

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<sup>3</sup> Tenn. Code Ann. § 4-5-310.

<sup>4</sup> Tenn. Code Ann. § 65-4-118(b)(1).

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, 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.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Monica Smith-Ashford". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Monica Smith-Ashford, Hearing Officer