

BEFORE THE TENNESSEE PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

August 21, 2023

IN RE:

ATMOS ENERGY CORPORATION NOTICE OF
FILING DEPRECIATION STUDY AND REQUEST
FOR APPROVAL OF NEW DEPRECIATION
RATES

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DOCKET NO.
23-00050

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 Division of the Office of the Tennessee Attorney General (“Consumer Advocate”) on August 1, 2023.

RELEVANT BACKGROUND

On June 29, 2023, Atmos Energy Corporation (“Atmos” or the “Company”) filed the *Atmos Energy Corporation Tennessee Direct Kentucky/Mid-States Division, and Shared Services Unit Depreciation Study* (“*Petition*”). Atmos is a public utility engaged in the business of transporting, distributing, and selling natural gas in areas of Tennessee, as well as certain other states. Atmos filed its recent depreciation study and seeks Commission approval of the new depreciation rates. If approved, the new depreciation rates would be used in Atmos’ next Annual Rate Review filing in February 1, 2024.

CONSUMER ADVOCATE’S *PETITION TO INTERVENE*

On August 1, 2023, 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 that:

Consumers' interests, including without limitation the proposed increase in rates to be paid by consumers as a result of 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), 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 Docket No. 14-00146, as well as the related settlement agreements as applicable in that docket.¹

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

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

¹ *Petition to Intervene*, p. 2 (August 1, 2023).

² *Id.* at 2-3.

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.³

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.⁴

Because approval of the Atmos *Petition* to implement new depreciation rates would result in an increase in depreciation expense in Tennessee which would be rolled into the revenue requirement for the Company's next Annual Rate Review filing, the Hearing Officer finds there is a sufficient factual basis to establish 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

³ Tenn. Code Ann. § 4-5-310.

⁴ Tenn. Code Ann. § 65-4-118(b)(1).

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 Division of the Office of the Tennessee Attorney General is granted. The Consumer Advocate Division of the Office of the Tennessee 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