

Chapter 267

(House Bill 556)

AN ACT concerning

Public Service Commission – Virtual Public Hearings

FOR the purpose of authorizing the Public Service Commission to conduct certain hearings relating to certain rate increases virtually; authorizing the Commission to conduct certain public hearings relating to certain certificates of public convenience and necessity virtually in a certain manner; requiring the Commission to provide certain notice of certain proceedings being conducted virtually; making this Act an emergency measure; and generally relating to the Public Service Commission and public hearings.

BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,
Article – Public Utilities
Section 3–104 and 7–207(d)
Annotated Code of Maryland
(2020 Replacement Volume and 2020 Supplement)

SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,
That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

Article – Public Utilities

3–104.

(a) (1) The Commission shall institute and conduct proceedings reasonably necessary and proper to the exercise of its powers or the performance of its duties.

(2) The Commission shall conduct its proceedings en banc or in panels of:

(i) at least three commissioners; or

(ii) one public utility law judge and at least two commissioners.

(3) A quorum consists of a majority of the Commission or a majority of a panel.

(b) (1) The Commission, a commissioner, or a public utility law judge may conduct hearings, examine witnesses, administer oaths, and perform any other acts necessary to the conduct of proceedings.

(2) The Executive Secretary of the Commission may administer oaths.

(3) Each record of a proceeding of the Commission is a public record.

(c) To the extent necessary to receive public comment for each application for a rate increase, the Commission shall hold a hearing at a convenient location and time during evening hours:

(1) **IN PERSON** in the service area affected; **OR**

(2) **VIRTUALLY, WITH APPROPRIATE NOTICE PROVIDED SO THAT PERSONS IN THE SERVICE AREA AFFECTED MAY PARTICIPATE IN THE HEARING.**

(d) (1) The Commission may delegate to a commissioner or to a public utility law judge the authority to conduct a proceeding that is within the Commission's jurisdiction.

(2) In a delegated proceeding, the commissioner or public utility law judge shall:

(i) conduct the hearing and any other proceeding that the commissioner or public utility law judge considers necessary; and

(ii) file with the Commission, and simultaneously serve on all parties, a proposed order and findings of fact.

(3) The proposed order shall become final unless appealed as provided in § 3-113(d) of this subtitle.

(e) (1) This subsection applies unless, after considering any staff recommendation as to the extent of staff participation, the Commission determines that the public interest would not be served by staff participation.

(2) In each matter before the Commission, the staff of the Commission shall:

(i) analyze the data submitted to the Commission;

(ii) prepare a staff position based on that analysis; and

(iii) make an evidentiary presentation setting forth the staff's analysis of the issues and its recommendations.

(3) In making analyses and recommendations, the staff is:

(i) governed by the criteria in § 2-113 of this article; and

(ii) a party and has the rights of a party to the proceeding, including the rights specified in § 3–107 of this subtitle.

(4) The staff shall present direct and redirect cases of its own, cross-examine, submit briefs, and engage in oral argument as the staff considers necessary to ensure that the Commission has a complete record on all relevant issues in a particular case.

7–207.

(d) (1) **(I)** The Commission shall provide an opportunity for public comment and hold a public hearing on the application for a certificate of public convenience and necessity in each county and municipal corporation in which any portion of the construction of a generating station, an overhead transmission line designed to carry a voltage in excess of 69,000 volts, or a qualified generator lead line is proposed to be located.

(II) THE COMMISSION MAY HOLD THE PUBLIC HEARING VIRTUALLY RATHER THAN IN PERSON IF THE COMMISSION PROVIDES A COMPARABLE OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT AND PARTICIPATION IN THE HEARING.

(2) The Commission shall hold the public hearing jointly with the governing body of the county or municipal corporation in which any portion of the construction of the generating station, overhead transmission line, or qualified generator lead line is proposed to be located, unless the governing body declines to participate in the hearing.

(3) (i) Once in each of the 4 successive weeks immediately before the hearing date, the Commission shall provide weekly notice of the public hearing and an opportunity for public comment:

1. by advertisement in a newspaper of general circulation in the county or municipal corporation affected by the application;
2. on two types of social media; and
3. on the Commission’s website.

(ii) Before a public hearing, the Commission shall coordinate with the governing body of the county or municipal corporation in which any portion of the construction of the generating station, overhead transmission line, or qualified generator lead line is proposed to be located to identify additional options for providing, in an efficient and cost-effective manner, notice of the public hearing through other types of media that are familiar to the residents of the county or municipal corporation.

(4) (i) On the day of a public hearing, an informational sign shall be

posted prominently at or near each public entrance of the building in which the public hearing will be held.

(ii) The informational sign required under subparagraph (i) of this paragraph shall:

1. state the time, room number, and subject of the public hearing; and

2. be at least 17 by 22 inches in size.

(III) IF THE PUBLIC HEARING IS CONDUCTED VIRTUALLY RATHER THAN IN PERSON, THE COMMISSION SHALL PROVIDE INFORMATION ON THE HEARING PROMINENTLY ON THE COMMISSION’S WEBSITE.

(5) (i) The Commission shall ensure presentation and recommendations from each interested State unit, and shall allow representatives of each State unit to sit during hearing of all parties.

(ii) The Commission shall allow each State unit 15 days after the conclusion of the hearing to modify the State unit’s initial recommendations.

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act is an emergency measure, is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public health or safety, has been passed by a ye and nay vote supported by three-fifths of all the members elected to each of the two Houses of the General Assembly, and shall take effect from the date it is enacted.

Approved by the Governor, May 18, 2021.