

§ 62-15. Office of executive director; Public Staff, structure and function.

(a) There is established in the Commission the office of executive director, whose salary and longevity pay shall be the same as that fixed for members of the Commission. "Service" for purposes of longevity pay means service as executive director of the Public Staff. The executive director shall be appointed by the Governor subject to confirmation by the General Assembly by joint resolution. The name of the executive director appointed by the Governor shall be submitted to the General Assembly on or before May 1 of the year in which the term of his office begins. The term of office for the executive director shall be six years, and the initial term shall begin July 1, 1977. The executive director may be removed from office by the Governor in the event of his incapacity to serve; and the executive director shall be removed from office by the Governor upon the affirmative recommendation of a majority of the Commission, after consultation with the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Agriculture and Natural and Economic Resources, the Senate Appropriations Committee on Agriculture, Natural, and Economic Resources, and the chairs of the House of Representatives Appropriations Committee on Agriculture and Natural and Economic Resources of the General Assembly. In case of a vacancy in the office of executive director for any reason prior to the expiration of his term of office, the name of his successor shall be submitted by the Governor to the General Assembly, not later than four weeks after the vacancy arises. If a vacancy arises in the office when the General Assembly is not in session, the executive director shall be appointed by the Governor to serve on an interim basis pending confirmation by the General Assembly.

(b) There is established in the Commission a Public Staff. The Public Staff shall consist of the executive director and such other professional, administrative, technical, and clerical personnel as may be necessary in order for the Public Staff to represent the using and consuming public, as hereinafter provided. All such personnel shall be hired, supervised, and directed by the executive director, as provided by law. The Public Staff shall not be subject to the supervision, direction, or control of the Commission, the chairman, or members of the Commission.

(c) Except for the executive director, the salaries and compensation of all such personnel shall be fixed in the manner provided by law for fixing and regulating salaries and compensation by other State agencies, except that the Public Staff and its employees are exempt from the classification and compensation rules established by the State Human Resources Commission pursuant to G.S. 126-4(1) through (4); G.S. 126-4(5) only as it applies to hours and days of work, vacation, and sick leave; G.S. 126-4(6) only as it applies to promotion and transfer; G.S. 126-4(10) only as it applies to the prohibition of the establishment of incentive pay programs; and Article 2 of Chapter 126 of the General Statutes, except for G.S. 126-7.1.

(d) It shall be the duty and responsibility of the Public Staff to:

- (1) Review, investigate, and make appropriate recommendations to the Commission with respect to the reasonableness of rates charged or proposed to be charged by any public utility and with respect to the consistency of such rates with the public policy of assuring an energy supply adequate to protect the public health and safety and to promote the general welfare;
- (2) Review, investigate, and make appropriate recommendations to the Commission with respect to the service furnished, or proposed to be furnished by any public utility;
- (3) Intervene on behalf of the using and consuming public, in all Commission proceedings affecting the rates or service of any public utility;
- (4) When deemed necessary by the executive director in the interest of the using and consuming public, petition the Commission to initiate proceedings to review, investigate, and take appropriate action with respect to the rates, operations, or service of public utilities;

- (5) Intervene on behalf of the using and consuming public in all certificate applications filed pursuant to the provisions of G.S. 62-110.1, and provide assistance to the Commission in making the analysis and plans required pursuant to the provisions of G.S. 62-110.1 and 62-155;
- (6) Intervene on behalf of the using and consuming public in all proceedings wherein any public utility proposes to reduce or abandon service to the public;
- (7) Investigate complaints affecting the using and consuming public generally which are directed to the Commission, members of the Commission, or the Public Staff and where appropriate make recommendations to the Commission with respect to such complaints;
- (8) Make studies and recommendations to the Commission with respect to standards, regulations, practices, or service of any public utility pursuant to the provisions of G.S. 62-43; provided, however, that the Public Staff shall have no duty, responsibility, or authority with respect to the enforcement of natural gas pipeline safety laws, rules, or regulations;
- (9) When deemed necessary by the executive director, in the interest of the using and consuming public, intervene in Commission proceedings with respect to transfers of franchises, mergers, consolidations, and combinations of public utilities pursuant to the provisions of G.S. 62-111;
- (10) Repealed by Session Laws 2021-23, s. 3, effective May 17, 2021.
- (11) Review, investigate, and make appropriate recommendations to the Commission with respect to contracts of public utilities with affiliates or subsidiaries, pursuant to the provisions of G.S. 62-153;
- (12) When deemed necessary by the executive director, in the interest of the using and consuming public, advise the Commission with respect to securities, regulations, and transactions, pursuant to the provisions of Article 8 of this Chapter.
- (13) When deemed necessary by the executive director in the interest of the using and consuming public, appear before State and federal courts and agencies in matters affecting public utility service.

(e) The Public Staff shall have no duty, responsibility, or authority with respect to the laws, rules or regulations pertaining to the physical facilities or equipment of common, contract and exempt carriers, the registration of vehicles or of insurance coverage of vehicles of common, contract and exempt carriers; the licensing, training, or qualifications of drivers or other persons employed by common, contract and exempt carriers, or the operation of motor vehicle equipment by common, contract and exempt carriers in the State.

(f) The executive director representing the Public Staff shall have the same rights of appeal from Commission orders or decisions as other parties to Commission proceedings.

(g) Upon request, the executive director shall employ the resources of the Public Staff to furnish to the Commission or its members such information and reports or conduct such investigations and provide such other assistance as may reasonably be required in order to supervise and control the public utilities of the State as may be necessary to carry out the laws providing for their regulation.

(h) The executive director is authorized to employ, subject to approval by the State Budget Officer, expert witnesses and such other professional expertise as the executive director may deem necessary from time to time to assist the Public Staff in its participation in Commission proceedings, and the compensation and expenses therefor shall be paid by the utility or utilities participating in said proceedings. Such compensation and expenses shall be treated by the Commission, for ratemaking purposes, in a manner generally consistent with its treatment of similar expenditures incurred by utilities in the presentation of their cases before the

Commission. An accounting of such compensation and expenses shall be reported annually to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Agriculture and Natural and Economic Resources, the Senate Appropriations Committee on Agriculture, Natural, and Economic Resources, and the chairs of the House of Representatives Appropriations Committee on Agriculture and Natural and Economic Resources and to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate.

(i) The executive director, within established budgetary limits, and as allowed by law, shall authorize and approve travel, subsistence, and related necessary expenses of the executive director or members of the Public Staff, incurred while traveling on official business. (1949, c. 1009, s. 3; 1963, c. 1165, s. 1; 1977, c. 468, s. 4; 1981, c. 475; 1983, c. 717, s. 12.1; 1985, c. 499, s. 4; 1989, c. 781, s. 41.3; 1989 (Reg. Sess., 1990), c. 1024, s. 13; 1999-237, s. 28.21A; 2011-291, ss. 2.8, 2.9; 2017-57, s. 14.1(p); 2021-23, ss. 3, 24, 25; 2023-134, s. 11.16(b); 2023-138, s. 6(b); 2024-57, s. 3D.1(c).)