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BEFORE THE
FLORIDA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

In the Matter of:

DOCKET NO. 20240025-EI

Petition for rate increase
by Duke Energy Florida.

_____ /

PROCEEDINGS: SERVICE HEARING

COMMISSIONERS
PARTICIPATING: CHAIRMAN MIKE LA ROSA
COMMISSIONER ART GRAHAM
COMMISSIONER GARY F. CLARK
COMMISSIONER ANDREW GILES FAY
COMMISSIONER GABRIELLA PASSIDOMO

DATE: Tuesday, June 11, 2024

TIME: Commenced: 9:30 a.m.
Concluded: 11:00 a.m.

PLACE: Betty Easley Conference Center
Room 148
4075 Esplanade Way
Tallahassee, Florida

REPORTED BY: DEBRA R. KRICK
Court Reporter and
Notary Public in and for
the State of Florida at Large

PREMIER REPORTING
TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA
(850) 894-0828

1 APPEARANCES:

2 DIANNE TRIPLETT, ESQUIRE, 299 First Avenue
3 North, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701; appearing on
4 behalf of Duke Energy Florida (Duke).

5 AUSTIN WATROUS and MARY A. WESSLING,
6 ESQUIRES, OFFICE OF PUBLIC COUNSEL, c/o The Florida
7 Legislature, 111 West Madison Street, Room 812,
8 Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1400, appearing on behalf of
9 the Citizens of the State of Florida (OPC.).

10 BRADLEY MARSHALL and JORDAN LEUBKEMANN,
11 ESQUIRES, Earthjustice, 111 S. Martin Luther King Jr.
12 Boulevard, Tallahassee, Florida 32301; appearing on
13 behalf of Florida Rising (Florida Rising) and League of
14 United Latin American Citizens of Florida (LULAC).

15 SARI AMIEL, ESQUIRE, 50 F St. NW, Eighth
16 Floor, Washington, DC 20001; appearing on behalf of
17 Sierra Club (Sierra Club).

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1 APPEARANCES CONTINUED:

2 SHAW STILLER and MAJOR THOMPSON, ESQUIRES,
3 FPSC General Counsel's Office, 2540 Shumard Oak
4 Boulevard, Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0850, appearing on
5 behalf of the Florida Public Service Commission (Staff).

6 KEITH HETRICK, GENERAL COUNSEL; MARY ANNE
7 HELTON, DEPUTY GENERAL COUNSEL, Florida Public Service
8 Commission, 2540 Shumard Oak Boulevard, Tallahassee,
9 Florida 32399-0850, Advisor to the Florida Public
10 Service Commission.

11 KEITH HETRICK, GENERAL COUNSEL; MARY ANNE
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14 Florida 32399-0850, Advisor to the Florida Public
15 Service Commission.

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1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Good morning. Everybody.
3 Welcome to this customer service hearing. This is
4 save big part of our review of the Duke Energy
5 Florida request for a rate adjustment. Today's
6 service hearing is an important part of our
7 process, and it dedicates -- dedicated to the
8 hearing for you, the customer.

9 My name is Mike La Rosa. I have the privilege
10 of serving as Chairman here at the Florida Public
11 Service Commission. With me is my fellow
12 Commissioners. I would like to give them a few
13 seconds here to just quickly introduce themselves,
14 but before I do that, I also want to address that
15 we do have an interpreter, Jackie Guldris, who is
16 here in the room, and she will be able to interpret
17 as we go along everything into Spanish. So I am
18 going to give her an opportunity just to maybe
19 interpret the opening remarks and then I will allow
20 her to interpret what our Commissioners are saying
21 in their interdiction, and then will -- she's got a
22 script in front of her as we go along.

23 So, Jackie. I guess she's on the phone.

24 Thank you, Jackie.

25 MS. GULDRIS: Thank you. Can you hear me?

1 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Yes, we can hear you loud
2 and clear.

3 MS. GULDRIS: Wonderful. Thank you very much
4 to the Commissioners.

5 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

6 MS. GULDRIS: Thank you, Chairman.

7 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you, Jackie.
8 Let's start with Commissioner Graham,
9 introduction.

10 COMMISSIONER GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
11 My name is Art Graham, and I am one of your
12 five Commissioners on the Florida Public Service
13 Commission.

14 I just wanted to say a few words. This is the
15 time for you, the customer, to speak to us. Tell
16 us about what your issues are. Tell us about the
17 things that Duke are -- that Duke is doing very
18 well. Tell us about things that Duke is doing not
19 very well. We know that you are in a monopoly and
20 you don't have any choice on who you pick on your
21 power company, but that's no reason why they are
22 not doing a fantastic job for you, and we want to
23 hear about your experiences with customer service
24 and any other details you could tell us, the good,
25 the bad and the ugly.

1 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Jackie, do you mind
2 interpreting that?

3 MS. GULDRIS: Yes.

4 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

5 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Commissioner Clark.

6 COMMISSIONER CLARK: Thank you, Chairman La
7 Rosa.

8 My name is Gary Clark, also a member of the
9 Florida Public Service Commission. And just to
10 echo the sentiments from Commissioner Graham, we
11 are excited to have you here with us today, those
12 that are live, those are that on the phone, I look
13 forward to your testimony.

14 Thank you.

15 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

16 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Commissioner Fay.

17 COMMISSIONER FAY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

18 And I just -- I am Commissioner Andrew Fay. I
19 just want to thank the customers that we have that
20 took the time today to join the call and give us
21 their feedback. It's very important to us, and so
22 thank you to all of them for taking time away from
23 their daily schedule.

24 Thank you.

25 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

1 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Commissioner Passidomo.

2 COMMISSIONER PASSIDOMO: Hi. Thank you, Mr.
3 Chairman.

4 I am Gabriella Passidomo. I am the final of
5 the five Commissioners here. I just want to take
6 an opportunity to thank all of the customers that
7 have called in, as well as written to us.

8 I will continue to say this, but your written
9 comments also we review individually, and it goes
10 into our consideration for this decision. So thank
11 you for taking the time to express your thoughts
12 about the company.

13 Thank you.

14 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

15 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you, Commissioners.
16 Staff, will you please read the notice?

17 MR. STILLER: Yes, Mr. Chair.

18 By notice dated May 24, 2024, this time and
19 place has been set for a customer service hearing
20 in Docket No. 20240025-EI. The purpose of the
21 service hearing is set more -- forth more fully in
22 the motion.

23 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

24 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you.

25 At this time, let's take appearances of the

1 counsel, starting with Duke, but let's hold for
2 half a second and let her interpret that.

3 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

4 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Duke, you are recognized.

5 MS. TRIPLETT: Good morning. Dianne Triplett
6 on behalf of Duke Energy Florida.

7 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Office of Public Counsel.

8 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

9 MR. WATROUS: Austin Watrous and Ali Wessling
10 on behalf of the Office of Public Counsel.

11 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

12 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Florida Rising and United
13 Latin American Citizens of Florida.

14 MR. LUEBKEMANN: Thank you.

15 Jordan Luebkekmann on behalf of --

16 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

17 MR. LUEBKEMANN: Yes, thank you. Jordan
18 Luebkekmann and Bradley Marshall on behalf of
19 Florida Rising and LULAC.

20 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

21 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: I believe we have the --
22 I am sorry, Ms. Guldris. I will let you
23 finish.

24 MS. GULDRIS: Yes.

25 MS. AMIEL: Sari Amiel on behalf of Sierra

1 Club.

2 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: All right. If anyone else
3 -- I know we have some folks on the line and, of
4 course, so is our interpreter, so if you are not
5 speaking, please don't forget to have your phone on
6 mute.

7 And I apologize if that's Sierra Club, but
8 Sierra Club, go ahead, you are recognized and we
9 will have Ms. Guldris interpret afterwards.

10 MS. AMIEL: My apologies.

11 This is Sari Amiel on behalf of the Sierra
12 Club.

13 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

14 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Staff counsel.

15 MR. STILLER: Shaw Stiller and Major Thompson
16 on behalf of Public Service Commission staff.

17 I would also like to note the appearances of
18 Mary Anne Helton, your Advisor, and Keith Hetrick,
19 your General Counsel.

20 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

21 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you counsel. Thank
22 you for those all that are on the phone and, of
23 course, appearing before us.

24 I just want to provide a quick overview of the
25 proceedings. Ms. Guldris, I know you have my --

1 part of my script in front of you, so I will go
2 through it and then I will turn it to you, but let
3 me begin, again, of course, by thanking everybody
4 to be part of this experience. Obviously, the
5 quality of service provided by Duke is important.

6 In August, there will be a technical hearing
7 where the Commission will hear from witnesses about
8 evidence of this case. I encourage you all to
9 watch the hearing on our website, as you may help
10 to better understand how our process works, and
11 ultimately how our decision in the case is made.

12 This meeting will be transcribed and will
13 become part of the official record. For those of
14 you who have preregistered to speak, you were given
15 an option to check off an affirmation of your
16 testimony today. If you have not previously
17 provided this affirmation, I will need to swear you
18 in over the phone before you share your comments.

19 Please note that your comments will also be
20 subject to cross-examination. Meaning that you may
21 be asked questions by either of the parties that
22 are here, or by a Commissioner. But please don't
23 let that intimidate you as you become -- because
24 all the interested in making sure that you are
25 heard and understood clearly.

1 In addition too sharing your comments here,
2 you may also provide your comments on additional
3 material by traditional mail or by email. To
4 contact the Commission by mail, you can find a
5 pre-addressed comment card for download that is on
6 our website, or you can email
7 clerk@psc.state.fl.us. Be sure to include the
8 docket number, which is 20240025-EI -- so that's
9 20240025-EI -- in the subject line.

10 So whether your comments are made verbally
11 today or received in writing, be assured that your
12 comments will be reviewed and considered in our
13 evaluation of this case.

14 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

15 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Before we hear from the
16 customers, I would like to allow brief opening
17 statements by the parties who wish to speak.
18 Please limit your statements to three minutes, of
19 course, to give our customers the opportunity to
20 speak.

21 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

22 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Start with Duke.

23 MS. TRIPLETT: Good morning, Dianne Triplett
24 again -- good morning, Dianne Triplett again on
25 behalf of Duke Energy Florida.

1 And we filed a rate adjustment to make
2 investments for the benefit of our customer
3 percent. The synopsis is on the website, so I
4 won't go into more detail on that, but I would say
5 that we are very interested in hearing from our
6 customers today.

7 With me is Carol Cornell. She is the Director
8 of Consumer Affairs. And as we listen to the
9 testimony, we may ask for clarifying information
10 from our customers so that we can follow up if
11 necessary. But I did want to read a website -- an
12 email that customers can reach out to with
13 additional questions. Let me pause for translation
14 and then I will read --

15 MS. GULDRIS: Thank you. Thank you so much.
16 I appreciate it.

17 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

18 MS. TRIPLETT: The email is consumer affairs,
19 the number two, at Duke, D-U-K-E, dash, energy,
20 E-N-E-G -- E-N-E-R-G-Y, dot com. Again consumer
21 affairs, the number two, at Duke -- Duke dash
22 energy dot com.

23 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

24 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: All right. Next we are
25 going to move on to OPC. And, Ms. Wessling, if we

1 can kind of take a similar approach and just kind
2 of pause -- or I am not sure, I am sorry who's
3 speaking -- just kind of take a similar approach
4 and just maybe have a short pause when we kind of
5 get to a chunk of what you are saying. I am not
6 sure if the interpreter also has your script or
7 not. I know that she has mine, but I will go ahead
8 and recognize you, so, Office of Public Counsel.

9 MR. WATROUS: Thank you, it Mr. Chair.

10 My name is Austin Watrous, and I am an
11 attorney with the Office of Public Counsel.

12 MS. GULDRIS: Okay. Go ahead.

13 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: We'll get this -- yeah, go
14 ahead.

15 MR. WATROUS: My name is Austin Watrous, and I
16 am an attorney with the Office of Public Counsel.
17 Here with me is my colleague, Ali Wessling, as well
18 with the Office of Public Counsel.

19 For those of you who are not familiar with our
20 office, we were created by the Florida Legislature
21 and responsible for representing the customers of
22 Duke Energy Florida in matters before the Florida
23 Public Service Commission.

24 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

25 MR. WATROUS: We are here today because Duke

1 Energy has filed a request for a variety of changes
2 to their current rates. The Office of Public
3 Counsel has hired expert witnesses to address
4 multiple aspects of Duke's requested rate increase.
5 We have engaged in extensive discovery, and we have
6 deposed many of the utility's witnesses in order to
7 identify cost savings for customers. We will
8 continue deposing witnesses, conducting discovery
9 and preparing for trial right up to the date of the
10 hearing.

11 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

12 MR. WATROUS: The utility's original proposal
13 would result in base rate increases every year for
14 the years 2025, 2026 and 2027. If the original
15 proposal is accepted, on January 1st, 2025, Duke's
16 base rates would be increased by \$593 million, 98
17 million more on January 1st of 2026, and then
18 another 129 million on January 1st of 2027.

19 MS. GULDRIS: I have a feedback that I can
20 hear myself and it's very uncomfortable. I don't
21 know if you can --

22 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: I think we hear you okay.
23 Yeah. There is no issues.

24 MS. GULDRIS: Yeah.

25 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

1 MR. WATROUS: Duke is entitled to a reasonable
2 return on equity, however, the utility has
3 requested an excessive return on equity of 11.15
4 percent. Our research indicates that Duke only
5 requires a return on equity of just under
6 nine-and-a-half percent, which is consistent with
7 the current market for electric utility operations,
8 and is more than adequate for Duke to maintain its
9 financial integrity and credit worthiness.

10 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Ms. Guldris, you also may
11 want to try turning down your volume, which I know
12 could be a little difficult, maybe when you are
13 speaking, and that might eliminate the feedback.
14 We don't hear it on our end, but you may be hearing
15 it on your end.

16 MS. GULDRIS: Oh, okay. Okay. Thank you so
17 much.

18 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

19 MR. WATROUS: There are more issues that we
20 are challenging in this rate case to reach the best
21 possible outcome for customers. Please remember,
22 customers, that today is your hearing. It is not
23 the Commission's hearing, and it is not my hearing
24 and it's not Duke's hearing. This is your customer
25 hearing, and your sworn testimony is evidence and

1 not idle commentary. Please use your voice to
2 participate, and we look forward from hearing you.

3 Thank you.

4 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

5 MR. WATROUS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

6 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Florida Rising, LULAC, you
7 are recognized.

8 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

9 MR. LUEBKEMANN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

10 Jordan Luebkekmann on behalf of Florida Rising and
11 LULAC.

12 Florida Rising and LULAC are associations of
13 residential customers, and are in this case because
14 even though Duke had the fifth highest residential
15 electric bills in the country last year out of 149
16 utilities, with more than 100,000 customers, Duke
17 is now asking the Public Service Commission to
18 raise rates even higher.

19 MS. GULDRIS: Okay. That was a little bit
20 inaudible, but I will try to -- I don't know if I
21 was the only with that couldn't hear it.

22 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Would you like for him to
23 repeat himself? I can -- he can -- he can repeat
24 himself. That's okay. Go ahead, please.

25 MS. GULDRIS: Yes, that would be a good idea,

1 because it was a little bit inaudible. I didn't
2 catch a couple of words.

3 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Sure.

4 MR. LUEBKEMANN: Can you hear me now?

5 MS. GULDRIS: I can hear.

6 MR. LUEBKEMANN: Great. Thank you.

7 Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Jordan Luebke­mann on
8 behalf of Florida rising and LULAC.

9 Florida Rising and LULAC are associations of
10 residential customers, and are in this case because
11 even though Duke had the fifth highest residential
12 electric bills in the country last year out of 149
13 utilities, with more than 100,000 residential
14 customers, Duke is now asking the Public Service
15 Commission to raise rates even higher.

16 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

17 MR. LUEBKEMANN: A \$30 minimum bill in Duke's
18 petition functions like a high fixed charge. In
19 practice, that means that no matter how much
20 electricity you use or don't, your bill will never
21 be less than \$30. This mechanism punishes low
22 energy users, like those who have invested into
23 energy efficiency, or who leave the thermostat
24 higher than comfortable to save energy and money.
25 It's also regressive, as it disproportionately

1 impacts low and fixed income households who can
2 least afford additional changes. Duke's own
3 documents show that a true and fair fixed charge
4 should not be more than \$14 a month at the very
5 most.

6 MS. GULDRIS: It's a little choppy, but I got
7 the most of it.

8 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

9 MS. GULDRIS: Did you say \$30 a month?

10 MR. LUEBKEMANN: Yes.

11 MS. GULDRIS: Thank you.

12 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

13 MS. GULDRIS: Yeah, I couldn't -- it was very
14 choppy. I am sorry, I was not able to hear it. I
15 don't know if I'm the only one. It was choppy.

16 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Maybe the last two
17 sentences.

18 MR. LUEBKEMANN: Providing statements in
19 Spanish.

20 MS. GULDRIS: Thank you.

21 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

22 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: That's a lot easier.

23 MR. LUEBKEMANN: Maybe I will do that next
24 time.

25 Then there's Duke's --

1 MS. GULDRIS: Yeah, it's very choppy. I
2 couldn't get the sentences. It was missing words.

3 MR. LUEBKEMANN: I will make sure you have our
4 comments next time. I apologize for not sending
5 them.

6 One more paragraph and we'll turn it over.

7 Then there is Duke's --

8 MS. GULDRIS: Yes.

9 MR. LUEBKEMANN: Then there is Duke's
10 excessive requested return on equity, or ROE. ROE
11 refers to how much profit -- how much profit Duke
12 is allowed to charge customers for every dollar of
13 shareholder money it spends on new grid
14 infrastructure. The real cost of such projects is
15 the same no matter what Duke's ROE is. You just
16 get the privilege of paying extra for the same
17 stuff if Duke is allowed loud to earn a higher ROE.
18 In this case, Duke speaks a whopping 11.15 percent
19 midpoint, and 12.15 percent maximum despite the
20 decade's long national trend of lower ROEs.

21 The reason ROEs have been going down is that
22 utility commissions all across the country
23 recognize there is just not that much risk in
24 investing in a monopoly utility with guaranteed
25 profits.

1 Thank you.

2 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

3 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Okay. Next up is the
4 Sierra Club.

5 MS. AMIEL: Hi. Good morning, I am Sari Amiel
6 appearing on behalf of the Sierra Club an
7 intervenor in this rate case.

8 Sierra Club's main concern is Duke's continued
9 reliance on the uneconomic coal-fired Crystal River
10 Units 4 and 5, which imposes higher costs on
11 ratepayers.

12 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

13 MS. GULDRIS: I am sorry, could you repeat
14 that? I can't hear you.

15 MS. AMIEL: Yeah. There is a bit of echo on
16 the line. I'll repeat. Yeah. Sure.

17 Good morning. I am Sari --

18 MS. GULDRIS: It keeps coming in and --

19 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Yeah, and we had a hard
20 time hearing you on our end as well, so I will ask,
21 Sierra Club, do you mind restating that opening
22 comment?

23 MS. AMIEL: Yes, of course, and please let me
24 know if you can't hear me.

25 I am Sari Amiel, appearing on behalf of Sierra

1 Club, an intervenor in this rate case.

2 Sierra Club's main concern is Duke's continued
3 reliance on the uneconomic coal-fired Crystal River
4 Units 4 and 5, which imposes higher costs on
5 ratepayers.

6 Were you able to hear me?

7 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Yes.

8 MS. GULDRIS: Yes. Do you want me to
9 translate?

10 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Yes, please.

11 MS. GULDRIS: I will just -- I think it will
12 be better if it's shorter phrases. Thank you.

13 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

14 MS. AMIEL: Great. Thank you.

15 Crystal River operating -- costs will cost
16 exceeded its benefits to ratepayers. The net value
17 of Crystal River 4 and 5 have been decreasing since
18 2018. Coal costs have increased --

19 MS. GULDRIS: I can't hear you.

20 MS. AMIEL: Okay. Apologies. Try -- I can
21 try again.

22 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Yes, please.

23 MS. GULDRIS: I can't -- it comes in and out.
24 I don't know if I am the only one that is having
25 the problem.

1 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Yeah. So I just ask the
2 folks that are on just to make sure that you have
3 got your phones muted, because sometimes that
4 creates a little bit of feedback. So, again, I
5 apologize, but I will ask Sierra Club if you can
6 repeat that.

7 MS. AMIEL: Yeah. Of course. Yeah, apologies
8 for that.

9 So Crystal River's operating and maintenance
10 costs and fuel costs exceed its benefits to
11 ratepayers. The net value of Crystal River 4 and 5
12 have been decreasing since 2018. Coal costs have
13 increased, while the plant's capacity factor has
14 decreased.

15 MS. GULDRIS: Okay. That was much better.
16 Thank you so much.

17 MS. AMIEL: Of course.

18 MS. GULDRIS: Yes, let me go ahead and
19 translate that.

20 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

21 MS. GULDRIS: What has decreased? I didn't
22 get that.

23 MS. AMIEL: The plant's capacity factor.

24 MS. GULDRIS: The what?

25 MS. AMIEL: The capacity factor of the plant.

1 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

2 MS. AMIEL: Analysis -- okay, I will -- thank
3 you.

4 Analysis by Sierra Club's expert witness shows
5 that retiring Crystal River 4 and 5 in 2030 instead
6 of 2024, as planned, could save customers at least
7 \$155 million, yet Duke has not conducted an
8 up-to-date study of retiring Crystal River before
9 2034. It's, instead, relying on an outdated 2020
10 study. Since that study, there have been key
11 market and regulatory changes, including new
12 incentives for clean energy resources made
13 available under the Inflation Reduction Act,
14 volatility in fossil fuel markets and new EPA
15 regulations impacting coal-fired power plants.

16 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

17 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Sierra Club.

18 MS. AMIEL: Sierra Club welcomes Duke's -- may
19 I proceed?

20 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Yes, please.

21 MS. AMIEL: Thank you.

22 Sierra Club welcomes Duke's proposed additions
23 of solar capacity, which is a less costly and
24 environmentally cleaner alternative source of
25 capacity. When paired with storage, solar energy

1 is especially adept at ramping up to meet peak
2 demand. Retiring Crystal River 4 and 5, earlier
3 say by 2030, and replacing them with solar energy
4 would reduce system costs, and reduce the risk of
5 fuel prices and environmental regulations.

6 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

7 MS. AMIEL: Thank you.

8 Importantly, Duke can save even more money for
9 its ratepayers by retiring this coal capacity
10 earlier if it takes advantage of low cost loans
11 from the U.S. Department of Energy. The Energy
12 Infrastructure Reinvestment Program can provide
13 funds for utilities to refinance existing plant
14 balances, and reinvest their savings in Duke clean
15 energy resources.

16 Funding the retirement of Crystal River 4 and
17 5 and replacement with clean energy through this
18 program could potentially generate more than
19 \$123 million in additional savings above the 155
20 million in estimated savings from earlier
21 retirement of Crystal River 4 and 5.

22 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

23 MS. AMIEL: Thank you.

24 So to ensure just and reasonable rates for
25 Duke customers, we ask that this commission require

1 Duke to retire all coal burning equipment at
2 Crystal River 4 and 5 as soon as possible, but by
3 2030 at the latest.

4 Thank you very much for providing Sierra Club
5 with the opportunity to make this statement.

6 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

7 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you.

8 We will now move on to customer testimony.

9 It's my understanding that there is not any
10 public officials that have signed up or who are on
11 the line, so I am going to go directly to the
12 customers. I do want to make kind of a quick
13 statement off -- off script.

14 I do believe it's important that if we have
15 Spanish speakers that are here and need to be
16 interpreted, that the entire process in which -- in
17 which our hearing is conducted is also interpreted.
18 So I appreciate everybody for working with us, and
19 this is probably a little bit unorthodox from maybe
20 what we've done in the past, but I just thought
21 this was necessary. So thank you, certainly, for
22 your patience.

23 I will allow Ms. Guldris to interpret that.

24 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

25 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Okay. So we are -- we are

1 to start our customer testimony. We are going to
2 allow each customer up to five minutes to express
3 their comments. With us is Mr. Watrous from the
4 Public Counsel's office. He is your voice in this
5 process, and he is helping us today. When it's
6 your turn to speak, he will call your name in order
7 to -- in which you have signed up.

8 Mr. Watrous, I am going to ask if you don't
9 mind, maybe indicating if that person has signed up
10 as a Spanish speaker, if that's okay, and then that
11 will queue Ms. Guldris to be ready to interpret.

12 Ms. Guldris, it's not necessary to interpret
13 the English speakers into Spanish to make sure, of
14 course, that the Spanish speakers are interpreted
15 into English for us and, of course, any questions
16 that they might have.

17 So, Mr. Watrous, I am going to go ahead and
18 throw it over to you, if that's okay, to call the
19 first three names and the individuals.

20 MR. WATROUS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the
21 next three witnesses --

22 MS. GULDRIS: Let me translate, please --
23 yeah, let me translate --

24 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Yeah, please.

25 MS. GULDRIS: -- so they will know what's

1 going on.

2 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

3 MR. WATROUS: So the next three witnesses to
4 present sworn testimony are Lydia McCormick, Angela
5 Locarno and Elizabeth Castillo, who speaks Spanish.

6 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Lydia McCormick, you are
7 recognized for your comments. Ms. McCormick, are
8 you on the line?

9 Not hearing Ms. McCormick, I will move to
10 Angela Locarno. Ms. Locarno, are you on the line?
11 Ms. Locarno, are you on the line?

12 And not hearing Ms. Locarno, let's move to
13 Elizabeth Castillo, Elizabeth Castillo.

14 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

15 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Ms. Castillo, are you on
16 the line?

17 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

18 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Okay. I will call the
19 names again if they don't jump in in their order.
20 So if you are skipped over or you jump back on --

21 MS. LOCARNO: Can you hear?

22 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Yes, is this Ms. Castillo?

23 MS. LOCARNO: Hello?

24 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Yes.

25 MS. LOCARNO: Can you hear?

1 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: We can hear you.

2 MS. LOCARNO: Hello. You can hear me?

3 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Yes, if you don't mind
4 identifying yourself.

5 MS. LOCARNO: Yes. This is Angela Locarno.
6 We were kind of on mute.

7 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Okay. All right. Ms.
8 Locarno, you are recognized for your comments.

9 MS. LOCARNO: Okay. So I can start?

10 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Yes, you can start.

11 MS. LOCARNO: Okay. Hi, my name is Angela
12 Locarno. I live in Celebration, Florida. I am an
13 organizer with Central Florida Jobs with Justice.
14 And a part of our work that we have done is to talk
15 to community members about rising cost of utility
16 bills through our energy burden campaign and
17 listening sessions, and we have learned a lot that
18 the rising cost of these utility bills are putting
19 community members in difficult situations. And I
20 am sure you are going to hear a lot of that today
21 based on what we've heard and the folks that we
22 have kind of gathered to talk at these hearings
23 today.

24 But many are struggling to pay their utility
25 bills, and they want to stay in their homes. And

1 so to cope with these rising costs, some people may
2 decide to turn off their air conditioning so that
3 they can afford things like rent or rising food
4 costs. And when we think about the heat that is
5 already happening at this point, it's going to even
6 hotter in the summer months, this can make their
7 homes even more dangerous instead of a safe haven
8 because they are, let's say, turning off their air
9 conditioning to mitigate those rising costs.

10 And so I just really want to just really
11 listen to the folks sharing today, and think about
12 not just what they can afford, but also the health
13 and well-being of all the folks that are impacted
14 by these costs.

15 Thank you.

16 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you for your
17 comments.

18 Go back, is anyone else in that group of
19 three, Ms. McCormick or Ms. Castillo?

20 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

21 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Not hearing her, let's go
22 back to the next three.

23 MR. WATROUS: Okay. The next three witnesses
24 to present sworn testimony are Norma Quiroz, who is
25 a Spanish speaker, Maria Miranda, who is also a

1 Spanish speaker, and Josie Torres.

2 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Ms. Quiroz. Ms. Quiroz,
3 you are recognized.

4 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Can you hear?

5 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Yes. Please identify
6 yourself.

7 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay. So we are going
8 to translate on our end, so we will have our
9 witness speaking in Spanish, and then we will also
10 have our own translator. We will start now.

11 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Okay. And just, if you
12 don't mind, please identify who is speaking so we
13 can transcribe it correctly.

14 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay. Hello. My name
15 is Migella, and I am going to be translating.

16 MS. QUIROZ: Hi, my name is Norma, and I live
17 in Apopka. I am a member of the organization Jobs
18 with Justice. I am here to explain my worry about
19 the new rate hike in energy. And my worry is that
20 this new rate hike is going to be affecting my
21 salary, because it's going to -- the rate hike is
22 going to be higher, and my salary is -- the salary
23 stays the same. And I think that we have the right
24 to live in good conditions, and not that every year
25 it continues to go up because it keeps affecting

1 us.

2 But my worry, and I -- but this is my worry,
3 and I ask you all at the PSC commission to support
4 -- to support us and to support us with the federal
5 rights with this rate hike, and be able to have a
6 digni-- dignified life, and comfortable life,
7 because this rate hike affects us in our personal
8 lives by not being able to have commodities by
9 having to put our AC down, not being able to use
10 our electronics and things that we need in our
11 everyday life to be able to survive. And I think
12 we deserve to live a normal life and be able to
13 afford to pay our light bill.

14 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you. And just to
15 confirm, this is the testimony of Norma Quiroz?

16 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Correct.

17 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you.

18 Okay. Next up we have Maria Miranda. Maria
19 Miranda who also needs a Spanish --

20 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: And we will be doing --

21 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: I'm sorry, go ahead.

22 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: We will be translating
23 on our end as well.

24 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Okay.

25 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay. Here you go,

1 Norma.

2 Now I will be translating for Maria. This is
3 Migella speaking.

4 MS. MIRANDA: Hi. My name is Maria, and I
5 live at 728 Sheeler, Apopka, Florida. I am a
6 member of the Jobs with Justice -- (inaudible) --
7 my worry is that -- is to see that this rate hike
8 just doesn't seem to, like, stop.

9 I work at a nursery as a farm worker, and my
10 salary is around \$400 per week. This is really
11 hard to be able to support a family with all those
12 rate hikes. It is really important that you take
13 into consideration our petitions as the majority of
14 people that we live -- we live with minimum wage.
15 We have to take -- we have take some measures about
16 what's affecting us, and -- and how the -- the rate
17 hike is really affecting everyone. So my question
18 to you all is, like, where -- where is this going
19 to end? Where is this getting to?

20 To end this, I ask -- my position is that you
21 don't accept this rate hike for the light bills
22 because this rate hike will go up in food, and
23 rent, and in my -- and that will not be enough with
24 the wage that I have.

25 The rate hikes are happening here continue to

1 be higher, and they're -- it's happening more
2 often. And I received -- they have -- there have
3 been more approvals of rate hikes than I have
4 received as raises in my paycheck.

5 Thank you.

6 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you.

7 Josie Torres. Josie Torres, you are
8 recognized if you are on the line.

9 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

10 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Josie Torres, just hearing
11 if you are on the line. I do not hear anybody.

12 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

13 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Okay. Just a quick
14 reminder for those that are here in the room with
15 me, I mean, I will look up and certainly nod if you
16 have got a question, or if there needs to be
17 clarification. I know there is obviously a lot of
18 back and forth on this, but -- and the same for us,
19 Commissioners, if there are any questions, please
20 feel free to stop me and ask.

21 We will go to our next three, Mr. Watrous.

22 MR. WATROUS: The next three witnesses to
23 present sworn testimony are Michael Jones, Lillian
24 Alvarez, who is a Spanish speaker, and Mary Gerken.
25 And a reminder to those customers, you do have to

1 come off of mute to speak at this hearing.

2 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

3 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Michael Jones, if you are
4 on the line, you are recognized for your testimony.
5 Michael Jones. Mr. Jones, are you there?

6 MR. JONES: Yes, I am here.

7 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Sir, you are recognized for
8 your testimony when you are ready. You can begin.
9 Mr. Jones, we are ready for your comments when you
10 are ready to deliver them.

11 UNIDENDIFIED SPEAKER: Go baby go.

12 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: I feel like you are prepped
13 and geared up but I don't -- I am not hearing
14 anything. Mr. Jones, are you ready for your
15 testimony? I can always come back to you towards
16 the end.

17 Okay. I think it's fair to move on. Mr.
18 Jones, I will come back to you.

19 Lillian Alvarez. Lillian Alvarez.

20 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

21 MS. ALVAREZ: My name is Lillian Alvarez, and
22 I live in Apopka, Florida. I am here, like
23 everyone else, to talk about the rate hike and its
24 impact.

25 As a Duke Energy customer, I have seen my

1 light bill go up tremendously. This has also
2 impacted me because I have to make life decisions
3 on whether I keep my AC on, and, obviously, during
4 this month, it's almost impossible, but I also need
5 gas, can I afford my food and everything around
6 that?

7 So for me, if I just think about like me, but
8 also the community that I work with, I've seen how
9 they have been impacted. Duke is talking about
10 huge impacts on their end, but when you think of
11 raising rates up, think about the community in
12 Apopka that Duke has failed to protect their
13 customers during that time.

14 I have had people, kids tell me that Duke
15 Energy has said that they are not priority in those
16 areas. There has been flooding impacts around
17 them. I have seen people that have gone without
18 their light bills -- I mean, without their energy
19 on for 14 days after a hurricane. We have -- we
20 have been there to support them and, you know, to
21 try to find those needs, but that's not the
22 responsibility of the own community to be able to
23 be supporting each other in that way. I think that
24 the PSC is here to be able to support our -- our
25 needs and the impacts around them.

1 And I don't know, maybe this -- this means
2 that the PSC, or that Duke Energy goes into the
3 communities and really sees that the impact of this
4 rate hike continues have and how they are not
5 really helping the community.

6 Thank you.

7 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you for your
8 testimony.

9 Next up is Mary Gerken. Mary Gerken.

10 MS. GERKEN: Yes.

11 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: You are recognized when you
12 are ready.

13 MS. GERKEN: Good morning. My name is Mary
14 Gerken, I live -- can you hear me?

15 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Yes, we can hear you loud
16 and clear. You are recognized.

17 MS. GERKEN: Okay. Good morning. My name is
18 Mary Gerken. I live in St. Pete, Florida, 33705.
19 I have lived here for 40 years, and actually I am a
20 native. I was born in Jacksonville.

21 A little bit more about me. I am very
22 involved in my church, my neighborhood association.
23 I am an avid gardener and enjoy the outdoors as
24 much as possible in my beautiful state, even with
25 the heat as hot as it's been. I just recently

1 retired from a career as an accountant, and am
2 concerned about making sure my bills are covered as
3 I move into this stage of life.

4 I am a planner, so I have done what I can to
5 lower my energy usage by installing insulation,
6 replacing my old AC with a heat pump a few years
7 back, and I also installed a small array of solar
8 panels on my house to guarantee my monthly bills
9 would not exceed my income.

10 When I look over my electric bills, I realized
11 that many times in the fall and spring, I actually
12 produced enough energy to cover my usage, and I was
13 accepting at first of Duke's flat minimum fee, but
14 it's gone up once recently, and I believe you are
15 considering it again, which is concerning, because
16 I don't think it's fair.

17 I am also concerned for my neighbors and their
18 well-being. They may not have financial resources
19 to winterize and, when possible, install solar. In
20 many cases, conserving usage and improving
21 efficiency is low hanging fruit for citizens and
22 utilities to first tackle.

23 So, yes, I think that looking at that -- or
24 the coal powder plant, if they are asking for all
25 this money, they should totally be looking at that.

1 And I am sure that that is part of the plan since
2 they are asking for so much money, but, still.

3 So I am worried about this summer and the rise
4 in temperatures. We need more air conditioning to
5 keep cool. Is there a possibility I might -- and
6 so there is a possibility I might not be able to
7 produce enough solar, and with this increased
8 energy rate, I don't know if I can make my monthly
9 bills.

10 From my understanding, the increase that Duke
11 is requesting is excessive and unjust to the area
12 citizens. The Duke rep opened with saying that
13 this rate hike was for their customers, but I have
14 heard it's also to ensure their shareholders get an
15 increased return on return, and so, like, I don't
16 think that that's -- I think they are asking for
17 more than what is a normal rate of return.

18 My other concern about Duke is their tree
19 trimming policy. I have seen examples of excessive
20 trimming, and literally cutting down a tree that
21 was in a citizen's yard. Yes, trees can cause
22 damage, so tree trimming may be called for, but
23 they also protect and provide needed shade as a
24 source passive energy. We need all solutions to be
25 considered, and trees are important.

1 Thank you for your time and consideration.

2 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you for your
3 testimony.

4 Mr. Watrous, next three.

5 MR. WATROUS: The next three witnesses to
6 present sworn testimony are Chelsea Rivera, Ed Dye
7 and Russell Kinney.

8 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Ms. Rivera, you are
9 recognized if you are ready.

10 MS. RIVERA: Yes. Can you hear me? Chelsea
11 Rivera.

12 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Yes, we are ready.

13 MS. RIVERA: Okay. Great. Thank you.

14 My name is Chelsea Rivera, and I'm a central
15 Florida Jobs with Justice, and I live in St. Pete.
16 I am a Duke customer.

17 Specifically, I live in Childs Park, where my
18 neighbors still sit on a stoop and wave hello when
19 I walk out to my car, where the kids that live down
20 the street still knock on our doors just to say hi,
21 or tell us they are bored during the summer.

22 I live in Childs Park which is identified as
23 an environmental justice neighborhood. And in my
24 neighborhood, 74 percent of people are low-income,
25 86 percent of residents have asthma and 90 percent,

1 so every nine in 10 people, are identified as
2 energy burdened. And because of this rate hike
3 request that Duke just filed, that number is about
4 to shoot up.

5 Duke is requesting over \$2.1 billion in rate
6 increases over the next three years, which will
7 result in significant increases to customer bills,
8 which means that my already energy burdened
9 community will face increased financial hardship.

10 You know that they are seeking a return on
11 equity of 11.15 percent, which is far beyond
12 industry standard. And this is business as usual.
13 In the past five years, Duke's bills have increased
14 by 28 percent, and Duke profits have continued to
15 soar. In 2023, Duke's annual profits were \$23
16 billion, which was an increase from the year
17 before.

18 Duke exemplifies corporate greed and an
19 unrelenting thirst for money all at the cost for
20 working Floridians' well-being.

21 Lynn Good, the CEO of Duke is compensated over
22 \$25 million yearly, and surely she's not working
23 harder than the majority of folks in my community.
24 Did you know that her salary could pay the electric
25 bills of over 150,000 Floridians. It's inexcusable

1 the unchecked greed that we are witnessing right
2 now at the hands of our investor-owned utilities.

3 Mr. Giles Fay, Mr. Graham, Mr. La Rosa, Mr.
4 Clark, Ms. Passidomo, you are charged as a the
5 Service Commission with making sure that energy is
6 affordable for Floridians. Your mission, which I
7 pulled from your website, is to facilitate the
8 efficient provision of safe and reliable utility
9 services at fair prices. Fair prices.

10 We are telling you that this is not fair. We
11 ask you to come to Orlando so that we could tell
12 you to your face that this is not fair and you
13 refused that request. You are in Tallahassee, so
14 we are telling you the best we can via the phone
15 that this is not fair. This is not safe for our
16 health compromised populations. This is not right.

17 We ask you to please do your jobs and look out
18 for us. Look out for your community. Do not
19 approve this rate hike. We demand affordable
20 energy prices, and this means that we need you to
21 say no to this rate increase.

22 Thank you.

23 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you for your
24 testimony.

25 Next up is Ed Dye. Mr. Ed Dye. Ed Dye, are

1 you on the line?

2 MR. DYE: Hello, this is Ed Dye. Can you hear
3 me?

4 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Yes, we can hear you,
5 Mr. Dye. You are recognized when you are ready.

6 MR. DYE: Hello?

7 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Yes, Mr. Dye, we can hear
8 you loud and clear here in the hearing room.

9 MR. DYE: Thank you. Thank you.

10 This is Ed Dye. I have lived in Seminole,
11 Florida for the last 40 years.

12 Ladies and gentlemen, today I stand before you
13 to discuss an important issue that impacts our
14 community and our planet. We all understand the
15 urgent need to translation to sustainable energy
16 sources. Solar energy is at the forefront of this
17 transition, offering a clean, renewable and
18 increasingly affordable solution to our energy
19 needs. Yet, despite these benefits, there remains
20 significant impediment that hinders the widespread
21 adoption of solar energy, the \$30 minimum charge
22 levied on net metering customers.

23 It is essential to recognize the value that
24 solar customers provide to the grid. According to
25 a comprehensive study referenced by the National

1 Resource Council of Maine, solar power not only
2 contributes to reducing carbon emissions, but also
3 decreases the strain on our energy grid during peak
4 times. These contributions enhance grid resilience
5 and stability, which benefits all energy consumers
6 by helping communicate the risk of blackouts and
7 reduce the need for expensive grid upgrades.

8 Moreover, the financial burden imposed by the
9 minimum charge disproportionately affects those who
10 have investing in solar technology to both reduce
11 their environmental footprint and their energy.
12 This policy disincentivizes potential solar
13 adopters contradicting our country's goals to
14 encourage renewal energy usage and decrease carbon
15 emissions.

16 I understand the value of being connected to
17 the grid, but the more recent charge of less than
18 \$10 is more appropriate, given the value that solar
19 provides. We are not merely discussing a financial
20 incentive, we are talking about aligning our
21 policies and our environmental commitments,
22 fairness to solar customers, and making sustainable
23 choices accessible to more people.

24 Let us come together and support policies that
25 promote clean energy. Let's adjust this charge to

1 reflect the true value that solar energy brings to
2 our community and our environment. By doing so, we
3 empower more households and businesses to make the
4 switch to solar, furthering our progress toward
5 environmental sustainability.

6 Thank you for your attention and your
7 commitment for --

8 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you, Mr. Dye, for
9 your testimony.

10 Next up some Russell Kinney. Russell Kinney,
11 are you on the line? Russell Kinney, are you on
12 the line?

13 Not hearing Russell Kinney, let's move on to
14 the next group, which I believe only has one
15 person.

16 MR. WATROUS: The next witness to present
17 sworn testimony is Heaven Campbell.

18 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Heaven Campbell, you are
19 recognized. Heaven Campbell, if you are on the
20 line, you may begin. I heard somebody, so I wasn't
21 sure if it was somebody else, but, Heaven Campbell,
22 are you on the line?

23 Okay. Is there anybody else on the line that
24 has not signed up who wishes to speak, or maybe
25 someone who I have missed or was not on when their

1 name was called? Anybody on the line --

2 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

3 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: I am just going to read the
4 names that were signed up to speak that did not.

5 Linda McCormick, we did not hear from you.

6 Elizabeth Castillo, did not hear from you. Michael

7 Jones, Russell Kinney. I am not sure if I missed

8 anybody else in there. Any of those individuals on
9 the line?

10 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

11 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Okay. Not hearing anybody
12 else, that will conclude our customer testimony
13 section of this service hearing.

14 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

15 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: I just want to thank
16 everybody again for taking the time out of your
17 busy schedule to call into this service hearing,
18 your comments are very important to us in this
19 process, and we truly appreciate your willingness
20 to participate.

21 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

22 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: I will look to the parties.
23 Is there any other questions, thoughts? We are
24 good, Commissioners? Any other questions or
25 comments? Okay.

1 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

2 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Hearing none, then we will
3 stand adjourned.

4 (Interpreter providing statements in Spanish.)

5 (Proceedings concluded.)

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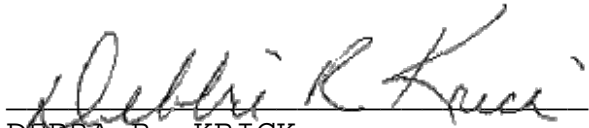
STATE OF FLORIDA)
COUNTY OF LEON)

I, DEBRA KRICK, Court Reporter, do hereby
certify that the foregoing proceeding was heard at the
time and place herein stated.

IT IS FURTHER CERTIFIED that I
stenographically reported the said proceedings; that the
same has been transcribed under my direct supervision;
and that this transcript constitutes a true
transcription of my notes of said proceedings.

I FURTHER CERTIFY that I am not a relative,
employee, attorney or counsel of any of the parties, nor
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attorney or counsel connected with the action, nor am I
financially interested in the action.

DATED this 26th day of June, 2024.


DEBRA R. KRICK
NOTARY PUBLIC
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EXPIRES AUGUST 13, 2024