

May 6, 2018

Florida Public Service Commission
2540 Shumard Oak Blvd.
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0850

RE: Docket No. 20170166-WS-Application for limited proceeding rate increase in Orange County by Pluris Wedgefield, Inc.

Distro:

PSC Chairman Art Graham
Commissioner Julie I. Brown
Commissioner Donald J. Polmann
Commissioner Gary F. Clark
Commissioner Andrew G. Fay
Executive Director Braulio L. Baez
Inspector General Steven J. Stolting

Governor Rick Scott
FL State Senator Linda Stewart - District 13
FL State Representative Rene Plasencia - District 50
US Representative Bill Posey - District 8
US Senator Bill Nelson
US Senator Marco Rubio

Dear Sir or Madam:

Pluris is constantly bragging about this “Best Tasting Water Award” and using it as their keynote in both their case and in the PSC meetings to vie for a rate increase to customers who have no other choice in the services or products they receive. Out of curiosity, and my incredulous belief that Pluris won an award for water that no one actually living in the community drinks, I spoke to the Chair and Vice-chair of Florida American Water Works Association (FAWWA) for Central Florida Region III. This is the organization that presented Pluris with the award. On Friday, April 27th, 2018, I spoke via phone to the Vice-chair of FAWWA Region III, Ms. Rhea Dorris. When I started asking about the processes used for the award, she was very reluctant to talk to me and provide information. When I asked why, she informed me that the company she works for¹ has Pluris as their clients. **Let me say that again... The Vice-Chair of Region III of the FAWWA that gave Pluris the “Best Tasting Water Award” works for the consultants that Pluris hired to assist² them in providing the water we as residents have no choice in receiving.** I had to assure her that I was strictly asking about the process of the FAWWA’s determination, the rules, how many utilities were entered in the contest, and whether or not there were any quality controls in place on the samples of water that is entered. Specifically, I wanted to find out if the contestants had to prove that the water samples entered into the contest came from the plants they own. She stated she would find out for me and I received many assurances from her that I would receive an e-mail with all the information I requested. To date, I have received no response from her.

On Wednesday, May 2nd, 2018, I received a call from Kunal Nayee, the FAWWA Region III Chair, and was able to speak to him for about 15 minutes. He was a bit more receptive to my inquiries, and was able to direct me to the FAWWA website where the contest rules are located. When I asked him if the FAWWA, at either the regional or national level, required quality controls on the samples entered, he seems to get suspicious and directly asked me if I was talking about Pluris. I told him that I happened to be a Pluris customer, but that I was only curious about the annual contest and that I was specifically just asking about how the contest is held and the process the FAWWA uses to determine the contest winner. I really just wanted to know if contestants had to provide proof the samples entered were from their own facility, or if they were required to sign some sort of affidavit or assurance stating where the water that is entered comes from. He told me that contestants do not have to do either, and that all contestants enter on an honor basis only. He went on to inform me that there has been a lot of talk at the FAWWA about Pluris both before and after the contest and that as a result of those conversations the organization is working to change the rules for the contest to provide stricter controls. When I asked him what he meant, he would not elaborate but he did say they are aware of the issues customers are having with Pluris as they have been very prevalent in the media over the past 2 years. After talking for a few more minutes, he did mention to me that there is no scientific basis to the contest, and that the judging is strictly subjective. He directed me to the News section of the FAWWA Region III website³, where for this year they specifically added this disclaimer:

“Congratulations to Pluris Wedgefield, Inc. for having the best tasting drinking water in Region III! The Best Tasting Drinking Water contest brings together other utilities to compete for the title. Samples are judged on taste, color, odor, and clarity. The judging is all subjective and is not scientific in any way.”

As you know, water is an essential resource for every living being, but the water in Wedgefield is not in a competitive marketplace. Maurice Gallardo, the President of Pluris, Joe Kuhns, the Pluris General Manger, nor any member of the

PSC or it's staff live in Wedgefield and have no idea of the struggle we face day after day with exceptionally poor water and extremely high bills for water we can not to use! We in Wedgefield do NOT have a choice of water providers and are currently, and quite literally, being held hostage by the Pluris monopoly which has proven to be dishonest, after a lab employee alleged false testing showing water was safe (and was subsequently fired for doing so)⁴ and additional private testing proved levels twice the legal limit⁵. Pluris is a manipulative private company who provides nothing to their customers other than deceit, extremely high bills, undrinkable water⁶, unresponsive customer service, Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FEDP) issuances⁷, boil water notices, involvement of County Mayor and Commissioners to attempt to take over the Utility⁸ (at residents expense), as well as condescending and intimidating letters from the Pluris General Manager⁹ in response to complaints and concerns directed to the PSC. Wedgefield is a deed-restricted community with additional codes and covenants that state that it is illegal for residents who receive Pluris water to install our own wells¹⁰. We don't have a choice in the service we get and this monopoly has got to end. Per the PSC mandate,

“The Florida Public Service Commission is committed to making sure that Florida's consumers receive some of their most essential services — electric, natural gas, telephone, water, and wastewater — in a safe, reasonable, and reliable manner. In doing so, the PSC exercises regulatory authority over utilities in one or more of three key areas: rate base/economic regulation; competitive market oversight; and monitoring of safety, reliability, and service.”

Pluris' product is very questionably “safe,” nor is it reasonable, reliable or palatable and the Public Service Commission's responsibility in their own self described areas of Rate Base/Economic regulation, Competitive Market Oversight, and monitoring of safety, reliability and service are also lacking. Additionally, our faith in the PSC, the only regulatory commission that can possibly make a difference, is waning rapidly. The PSC Mission Statement:

“To facilitate the efficient provision of safe and reliable utility services at fair prices.”

So, that raises the only important question up to this point:

Who is looking out for the residents?

Pluris, a for-profit and private monopoly won't look out for residents because it is not profitable. Seemingly, the commission that is supposed to be regulating it won't either, or just can't... We aren't asking for anything more than any other residents of this state already receives and takes for granted: Decent water at a fair price. As it stands right now, we have neither. If this price increase is granted, it will only add insult to injury for you to allow us to pay 10 times what Miami-Dade residents pay¹¹ and we will know that the PSC does not have the residents of this small East Orlando community's best interests in mind.

Sincerely,



Robert J. Hoppe

A Very Concerned Wedgefield Resident

Footnotes and citations contained on following pages:

¹ Florida American Water Works Association (FAWWA)
Regional Officers and Committee Chairs (Region III)
http://c.yimcdn.com/sites/www.fsawwa.org/resource/resmgr/2017-2018_Region_III.pdf

Kunal Nayee Region III Chair (Central Florida)
Atkins
482 S Keller Road Orlando, FL 32810
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Rhea Dorris Region III Vice Chair
Kimley-Horn & Associates
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Email: rheadorris@gmail.com

² Quote from Maurice Gallarda, Pluris President opening statement
PSC Meeting Transcript (Page 4 Lines 12-23) on April 20th, 2018
<http://www.psc.state.fl.us/library/filings/2018/03376-2018/03376-2018.pdf>

12 And I am particularly proud because this last
13 week, Pluris Wedgefield, for the second time in
14 three years, has won the best drinking water
15 contest in the American Water Works Association
16 contest in Central Florida. And the aquifer isn't
17 known to be the greatest quality of water beneath
18 the Central Florida region, and for them to do this
19 a couple of times out of the last three years is
20 really admirable. So I am proud of our guys, and
21 also as well as our outside consultants,
22 Kimley-Horn who assists us in that process, so
23 that's all I have to say.

³ FAWWA Region III website, "News Section"
<http://www.fsawwa.org/?page=204>

⁴ Water testing lab employee fired for reporting he was told to falsify water samples for testing.
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/221537654644903/permalink/776283569170306/>

⁵ Independent testing showed twice legal limit of TTHMS after FDEP reported water safe.
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/221537654644903/permalink/792429780889018/>

⁶ Undrinkable water
WFTV News Broadcast June 9th, 2016
<https://www.wftv.com/news/local/relief-might-come-for-orange-county-residents-after-years-of-undrinkable-water/333450888>

⁷ FDEP Statement June, 2016
<https://floridadep.gov/sites/default/files/Pluris-Wedgefiled%20Drinking%20Water%20FAQ.pdf>

⁸ Letter from Orange County Commissioner Ted Edward (District 5) to Mayor Teresa Jacobs - October 4th,
2106
http://apps.ocfl.net/eAgenda/archive/Agenda_11-01-16/css/Agenda_11-01-16_371.htm?PrinterFriendly=1

Letter from Director Orange County Public works to Mayor Teresa Jacobs - November 13th, 2017
http://apps.ocfl.net/eAgenda/archive/Agenda_11-28-17/css/Agenda_11-28-17_707.htm?PrinterFriendly=1

⁹ Pluris responses to customer complaints
<http://www.psc.state.fl.us/library/filings/2018/03379-2018/03379-2018.pdf>

¹⁰ Wedgefield Codes and Covenants (Page 10, Section 4.9)
<http://www.wedgefieldhomeowners.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Declaration.pdf>

¹¹ Per 1,000 gallons of water rate located in the comparison table of the last letter I sent to the Commission
<http://www.psc.state.fl.us/library/filings/2018/03020-2018/03020-2018.pdf>