

# A message from Janine Migden-Ostrander

## Consumers' Counsel



For 34 years, the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) has served as the sole statutorily appointed representative of the state's 4.5 million residential utility customers. The work of the OCC year in and year out has saved residential customers billions of dollars in utility costs. In a time of economic uncertainty and record-level unemployment, this office and its advocacy to keep rates reasonable for Ohioans are especially needed.

In 2010, the OCC was involved in 296 cases at the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO), Supreme Court of Ohio, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, and the Federal Communications Commission advocating for fair and reasonable rates and other issues for residential customers. This has been an especially noteworthy year for the OCC staff and our partners. In State Fiscal Year 2010-11, the OCC saved Ohio's utility customers more than \$54.8 million directly on its own and \$1.9 billion in collaboration with other parties with the OCC in a lead role.

Our advocacy in the electric industry was largely in response to filings by investor-owned utilities as a result of Ohio's electric energy law. The OCC's work was instrumental to protecting residential customers' interests in a new electric security plan, significantly excessive earnings tests, energy efficiency portfolios, renewable energy and smart grid plans. The OCC's involvement in these cases helped ensure the integrity of Ohio law and progress toward keeping rates reasonable for all customers.

The OCC worked diligently to develop a solution for FirstEnergy all-electric customers who experienced bills that, in some instances, climbed 300 percent higher than last winter. While credits were established to reinstate bills to their 2008 levels, the case lingered throughout 2010 and the OCC continues its advocacy into 2011.

For natural gas customers, the OCC's advocacy for wholesale auctions was proven successful in reducing rates for many residential Columbia Gas customers. Complaints about deceptive door-to-door marketing practices also resulted in favorable protections for customers as the OCC assisted in limiting an independent natural gas supplier from using unfair tactics to gain business.

The implementation of Ohio's telephone deregulation law dominated the OCC's work in the telecommunications industry. With our partners in Ohioans Protecting Telephone Consumers, the OCC preserved some of the protections for customers who only want basic local telephone service.

The OCC advocated for restrictions in the level of rate increases granted in several water industry cases before the PUCO. In one instance, a utility asked for a sixth rate increase since 2000, pushing the OCC to search for alternative ways to provide relief for customers. In 2010, the OCC worked with several legislators to promote legislation that would limit the amount of rate case expenses large water and sewer companies could charge customers. The increased amounts of water and wastewater bills also prompted the OCC to negotiate and secure shareholder funds to assist low-income customers who have trouble paying those bills.

The work of the OCC staff is as important as ever. The landscape of utilities in Ohio and across the nation is changing rapidly. Advocates such as the OCC are needed to protect residential customers' interests, keep their utilities connected and their costs fair and reasonable.

As we look toward 2011 and the challenges on the horizon for residential utility customers, I would like to thank Gov. Ted Strickland and Attorney General Richard Cordray and members of the General Assembly for their support of the OCC and our mission. I look forward to working with the new administration under Gov. John Kasich and to continuing the good working relationship between the Attorney General's office and the OCC under Attorney General Mike DeWine.

I would also like to thank the staff of the OCC for their unwavering commitment to working for Ohioans every day. I want to express my gratitude to each member of the OCC's Governing Board, who is dedicated to guiding the OCC in its mission to represent the state's residential utility customers. Finally, I want to thank the thousands of Ohio customers who have worked with and contacted the OCC, helping shape utility regulation, policy and prices. It is my pleasure to work with and on behalf of each of you every day.

**Janine L. Migden-Ostrander**  
*Consumers' Counsel*