

A message from Bruce Weston

Ohio Consumers' Counsel



In 2014, we again dedicated ourselves, at the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel, to representing and educating Ohioans regarding their electric, natural gas, telephone, and water services. We worked to fulfill our vision of informed consumers who are able to choose among a variety of affordable, quality utility services with options to control and customize their utility usage.

This vision matters for consumers in 4.5 million Ohio households. The outcomes of legislation and cases, the choices consumers make among alternative energy suppliers, and opportunities to conserve have the potential to account for hundreds of dollars on Ohioans' utility bills. With regard to consumers' energy choices, we produced our first online educational videos to help Ohioans.

Utility services can change with new practices and technologies. These changes can present new opportunities and challenges for consumers, as was seen in 2014.

An example is the increase in consumer concerns about high utility bills resulting from the reselling of utility services—such as electricity—in apartments, condominiums and other locations. We developed a list of principles for protecting consumers of resold utility services, which became part of our recommendations to lawmakers.

Another example is protecting the affordability and availability of basic telephone service (landlines) for Ohioans, as the telephone industry seeks further deregulation and transitions to new technologies. The need for consumer protection includes rural Ohio where telephone alternatives are fewer. In the legislative process at the close of 2014, we provided recommendations for this consumer protection. And, during that legislative process, Governor Kasich participated to protect Ohio consumers.

Also, we participated in regulatory cases and in the legislative process on issues involving energy efficiency. In both forums, we provided recommendations for balancing the costs and benefits of energy efficiency programs for consumers.

A continuing focus has been to try to transfer the relatively low energy prices in the marketplace to actual reductions on Ohioans' energy bills. In this regard, we recommended protecting consumers from paying subsidies to electric utilities. And we recommended limiting the proliferation of utility "riders" and other charges that increase Ohioans' electric bills.

Governing Board Chair Gene Krebs is to be commended for tirelessly sharing his time and advice for our consumer services in 2014. And thanks to Chair Krebs, Vice-Chair Susheela Suguness and all the Board members, as appointees of the Ohio Attorney General, for their guidance, encouragement and commitment to our agency's services to Ohioans. Thanks also to the Consumers' Counsel's staff, Deputy Consumers' Counsel Larry Sauer and former Deputy Consumers' Counsel Melissa Yost for their dedicated service in protecting consumers.

The Administration, legislators, and other policymakers are appreciated for their open door to hear consumer perspectives on these issues of importance to Ohioans. And thanks to those with whom we have partnered in our work for the public.

We look forward to serving Ohioans in 2015.