# Consumer Education

**Ohio's framework for utility consumers continues to involve the use of markets and government regulation for determining prices. Consumers are being asked to make decisions that may be new or difficult for them, such as choosing an energy supplier. The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) continued its tradition of consumer protection through education and information.**

## The Consumers' Counsel informs consumers on ways to manage their utility bills

OCC has Outreach and Education Specialists who work to help consumers make wise choices regarding their utility services. OCC participated in more than 875 events throughout Ohio in 2015. OCC provided information to Ohioans about their consumer rights and the resources available to them. Also, OCC provided information on Ohio's energy choice programs, and how to save money by making homes more energy efficient.

With the encouragement of the OCC Governing Board, OCC worked to expand its presence at Ohio's county fairs in 2015. OCC staffed information booths and met with many Ohioans attending fairs in the Counties of Darke, Hancock, Hocking, and Perry, as well as at the Hartford Fair (Licking Co.), the Farm Science Review and the Ohio State Fair.

OCC reaches out to consumers through a variety of forums. The OCC website (www.occ.ohio.gov) has been accessed by more than 68,000 consumers in 2015 for a total of more than 175,500 views. Visitors to the website can access all of OCC's informational fact sheets and newsletters.

Videos providing information on choosing an energy supplier can be found on OCC's YouTube channel and on the OCC website. Consumers can follow OCC on Twitter @OhioUtilityUser.

## Low-Income Dialogue Group

The Consumers' Counsel initiated and has coordinated the Low-Income Dialogue Group (Group), for more than a decade. The Group is comprised of representatives from many of Ohio's regional legal aid organizations, community action agencies, housing authorities and other community-based organizations.

Through the Group, advocates for low-income utility customers across Ohio are provided a forum. The forum includes opportunities to raise awareness and discuss solutions to utility-related concerns that may particularly impact those with fixed or limited incomes.

In 2015, OCC and several other Group members filed joint comments on the PUCO's proposed rules for Ohio's telephone lifeline program. (Case no. 14-1554-TP-ORD) The comments were filed to ensure that lifeline customers have access to telephone service.

Group members advocated on behalf of consumers throughout 2015 in instances when utility disconnection procedures threatened the rights and safety of Ohioans. Group members, including OCC, sought to protect consumers in disconnection processes involving the adaptation of smart meters. OCC and several Group members also advocated for consumers in disconnection cases that involved the issue of whether an electric utility had complied with established disconnection rules and regulations.

OCC testified in the General Assembly, on House Bill 64, regarding the future telecommunications network transition in Ohio. This transition can affect the availability and affordability of basic local telephone service. Group members have participated in the Ohio Network Transition Collaborative, created in House Bill 64, to advocate for consumer protections.

OCC looks forward to participating in the work of the Group in 2016.