



## Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

Your Residential Utility Consumer Advocate

# CONSUMERS' FACT SHEET

### Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

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# THE OFFICE OF THE OHIO CONSUMERS' COUNSEL

*"Your Residential Utility Consumer Advocate"*



### Representing Ohioans Regarding Their Utility Services

The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) was created in 1976 by the Ohio General Assembly to represent Ohio's residential consumers on issues related to their electric, natural gas, telephone, and water utility services.

OCC represents Ohio consumers in legal cases at regulatory agencies where decisions are made about the prices and quality of their utility services. OCC also advocates in the legislature for laws that promote affordable and reliable utility services for consumers. OCC provides outreach and education to consumers on utility issues and their choices in the transition to competitive markets.

State and federal utility cases are highly technical. Individual Ohioans are unlikely to have the time or resources to be able to advocate on their own behalf in these large cases where others, including utilities, are represented. OCC provides consumers with representation where they otherwise would have none.

### Regulator or Advocate?

State and federal utility regulators balance the interests of all stakeholders in making just and reasonable

decisions regarding utility services. For regulatory agencies (such as the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO)) to make balanced decisions, they should hear from those affected – including the utilities and their customers. OCC gives consumers a voice in the regulatory process. This voice is backed by legal and technical expertise on complex utility issues.

### Funding and Budget

In establishing the agency, the Ohio General Assembly decided that OCC's funding would not come from Ohio's General Revenue Fund (taxes). Instead, OCC's budget is paid through a fee on the intrastate gross earnings of utilities regulated by the PUCO.

This fee is minimal, and the agency's advocacy results in many more dollars in savings for residential utility consumers. In other words, the OCC saves consumers much more money than it costs to exist.

### Governing Board

By statute, the Ohio Attorney General appoints the agency's bi-partisan, nine-member Governing Board, with the advice and consent of the Senate. Three Board members are selected from

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### Mission

OCC advocates for Ohio's residential utility consumers through representation and education in a variety of forums.

### Vision

Informed consumers able to choose among a variety of affordable, quality utility services with options to control and customize their utility usage.



*The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel is an equal opportunity employer and provider of services.*

organized groups representing each of the areas of labor, residential customers and family farmers. No more than five members of the Board may be from the same political party. Board members serve three-year terms. The Board appoints the Consumers' Counsel to lead the agency in its services to Ohioans. The Board also appoints the Deputy Consumers' Counsel. The Governing Board usually meets every other month in Columbus.

### About the Office

OCC's staff is organized into four departments working together to achieve its mission and vision. They include:

**Analytical:** Technical expertise for analysis of utility operations in rate filings and other regulatory proceedings is necessary to protect residential consumers in Ohio. Their work includes accounting, economics, and financial analysis. The Department also monitors utility company compliance with state statutes, regulations, and company policies.

**Legal:** OCC is the legal representative for residential utility consumers in cases at the PUCO, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, Federal Communications Commission, and appellate courts. The legal staff's advocacy includes both negotiating for settlements and litigating in hearings, to obtain outcomes that are favorable for utility consumers.

**Operations:** The Operations Department is responsible for fiscal and administrative functions of the office. These functions include human resources, information management services, budgeting, purchasing, strategic planning, and contract management.

**Public Affairs:** The Public Affairs Department serves Ohio's residential utility consumers through outreach and education, media relations, and the legislative process. Educational information is provided to consumers

on OCC's website, in OCC's newsletter (*Consumers' Corner*), and in other ways such as informational fact sheets. The Department participates in the legislative process by providing information to legislators on issues affecting Ohio consumers.

### 24/7 Information

OCC's website ([www.occ.ohio.gov](http://www.occ.ohio.gov)) is an interactive and user-friendly resource for residential utility consumer information. Consumers can view OCC's free educational publications, sign-up for OCC's newsletter, and find updated information about key cases at the PUCO that could impact utility rates or service quality.

### Publications

OCC provides a variety of free publications, online or available by request, to inform residential utility consumers about ongoing utility issues and legislative initiatives. Among others, these include:

- ▶ Choosing an energy marketer;
- ▶ How to access utility assistance programs;
- ▶ Disconnection and reconnection of utility services;
- ▶ Household tips on energy efficiency and weatherization; and
- ▶ Protections from common utility scams, such as slamming and cramming.

The *Consumers' Corner* newsletter is published online. The newsletter offers articles about ongoing utility cases, proposed utility legislation, money-saving tips, and other information.

### Outreach & Education

OCC provides knowledgeable professionals to talk to residential consumer groups about utility issues. Speakers are available free of charge and can be scheduled by contacting OCC at 1-877-742-5622 or emailing [occ@occ.ohio.gov](mailto:occ@occ.ohio.gov).