

Office of Consumer Counsel Fact Sheet

- The Office of Consumer Counsel (OCC) was established by the legislature in 1984 to represent the public interest and the specific interests of residential, small business and agricultural consumers in electric, gas and telephone rate and rulemaking cases before the Public Utilities Commission (PUC), federal agencies and the courts. The Utility Consumers' Board (UCB) is an 11-member board appointed by the Governor to provide the OCC with policy guidance as well as accountability by evaluating the performance of the office and its director.
- The OCC is a cash-funded, type 1 policy independent agency in the Department of Regulatory Agencies. The cash funds come from an assessment on the state's regulated utilities collected through the Fixed Utility Fund. **Utility ratepayers pay about 4 cents a month in rates to fund the OCC.** Utility ratepayers also fund the PUC, as well as the utilities' lawyers and technical experts.
- The Office of Consumer Counsel continues to be an effective agency. **Since it was created in 1984, the office has saved consumers almost \$130 million through its efforts alone, and over \$288 million in shared savings with other parties for which the OCC was primarily responsible.** The OCC has achieved these savings, along with many other consumer benefits, with only 11 staff, including attorneys in the Department of Law, and an annual budget of about \$1.2 million. Historically, the OCC participates in about 80 to 100 utility cases annually.
- **For every dollar the OCC has spent, it has returned about \$40 to consumers through rate reductions, refunds, or reductions in rate increases requested by utilities.** In 1997, the General Assembly completed a favorable sunset review of the office.
- There are about 45 state utility consumer advocates including the District of Columbia. Several states have recently enacted legislation to establish an advocate office.
- Most of OCC's work is done in cases before the PUC that cover most aspects of a utility's business from its rates to its disconnection policies. The PUC hears evidence from the utility, the OCC, industrial or commercial customers, the PUC staff, and other parties. When the office prepares its case as the advocate for consumers, the staff examines the technical evidence filed by the utility, provides expert witness testimony, cross-examines other witnesses, and makes legal arguments to support the OCC's recommendation. The PUC's job is to balance the interests of all sides and make a decision based on the evidence. The OCC can appeal an unfavorable PUC decision to the Colorado courts. The right to appeal ensures that utility consumers' rights are fully protected.