

Quality of Life Result: The Office of Consumer Counsel is an independent state agency and acts as the advocate for consumer interests in all matters which may affect Connecticut consumers with respect to public service companies or regulated utility companies, such as electric, natural gas and water suppliers, and various telecommunications providers.

Key Funding Information. The OCC is a party to each contested case before the Department of Public Utility Control and is authorized to appear in and participate in any regulatory or judicial proceedings, federal or state, in which such interests of Connecticut utility consumers may be involved, or in which matters affecting utility services rendered or to be rendered in this state may be involved.

- ***One authorized vacancy is unfilled because it remains “unfunded.”***
OCC has filled its job vacancies going from 10 to 16 employees, including a paralegal, accounts examiner, finance specialist, rate specialist, and two attorneys. The agency is authorized for 17 positions so one authorized vacancy is unfilled because it remains “unfunded”. OCC’s last approved budget “gave back” funding of Personal Services (salaries) for 16 positions, but failed to provide the associated Fringe Benefits.
- ***Caseloads have steeply increased.***
OCC has experienced an increased caseload associated with rate cases from gas, electric and water utilities since early 2006 and we expect that trend to continue through 2007. Increased case activity is due to increased activity resulting from federal government initiatives, the *Energy Independence Act*, continuing procurement of electric generation services, and “restructuring” of telephone, gas and electric utilities.

Items Requested by OCC, but not included in Governor’s Budget

- ***Failure to fund \$5,698.00 of additional out-of-state travel.***
OCC requests that out-of-state travel be restored as the funding is necessary for participation at federal agencies in Washington, D.C., as well as for participation in ISO-New England, the New England Power Pool (“NEPOOL”), and the North American Electric Reliability Council (“NERC”). Travel is also necessary for the training of new employees. The OCC, like the DPUC, is active in its national association, NASUCA, occupying several executive positions which require occasional travel.
- ***Failure to fund \$205,945 of additional consultant expense.***
OCC’s statutory mandate to advocate for utility consumers in DPUC contested cases or federal agency proceedings includes the authority to hire outside experts. The current allowance does not even cover the costs of the consultant OCC hires to assist it in its participation in ISO-NE and NEPOOL activities, among others, which in light of the

current crisis situation in the electric market are essential functions that the OCC is uniquely positioned to fulfill.

Increases in OCC's Budget Associated with Governor's Energy Initiative

- ***Transfer consumer complaints interface to OCC.***

The Governor's Budget includes an increase of \$607,483 to expand the Office's function and transfer seven of the fourteen full-time positions currently assigned within the DPUC to handle consumer complaints and interface with utilities on behalf of customers. This unit within the DPUC handled nearly 7,000 customer inquiries, including over 3,000 complaints in 2006, as well as handling customer service, enforcing utility company rules and regulations, and service quality issues in proceedings before the DPUC.

OCC is supportive of this expanded focus on utility consumer issues, yet has a number of concerns pertaining to the appropriate resources necessary to perform the new role in a thorough and appropriate manner. OCC lacks detailed back-up information on the proposed functions to be transferred, staffing complement, and funding of Other Expenses in order to thoroughly respond to the new initiatives contained in the Governor's Budget.

- The Governor's Budget includes a reduction to Personal Services of \$77,150 associated with "PS Turnover". For OCC, that equates to at least one full-time funded vacancy. Since OCC is nearly fully staffed, OCC does not see how it would achieve these savings. The Office needs an explanation of the details surrounding this proposed budget adjustment.