

**The Energy and Technology Committee**

**Public Hearing, March 5, 2013**

**Office of Consumer Counsel**

**Elin Swanson Katz, Consumer Counsel**

Testimony of Elin Swanson Katz

**Proposed H.B. No. 6471, *An Act Concerning Tree Trimming by Utilities***

This bill establishes requirements for utilities to notify property owners, the Commissioner of Transportation and municipal tree wardens regarding tree trimming and removal, and also establishes a process for Public Utilities Regulatory Authority review if there is an objection. This bill also defines a “utility clearance zone” within which such notice requirements would not generally apply, requires the electric distribution companies to create a hazardous tree identification program in cooperation with municipalities, and requires municipalities to establish and enforce minimum requirements for property owners for cutting, trimming or pruning hazardous trees.

The Office of Consumer Counsel (OCC) is generally supportive of creating a more clear process for notice and objection to the utilities tree trimming operations. OCC is concerned that ten days may not be sufficient time to file a written objection to any such notice if, for example, the notice is sent at the beginning of a property owner’s vacation, and suggests that a minimum of two weeks might be more appropriate.

While OCC is supportive of encouraging property owners to maintain their trees in such a manner as to protect the utility infrastructure, OCC is also mindful that removal of existing large trees may present a significant expense that many homeowners would not be able to afford. The electric distribution companies already have programs to

address hazard trees that fall outside the utility clearance zone. Those programs are being expanded with enhanced tree trimming initiatives. OCC believes that utility enhanced tree-trimming is the most appropriate means of dealing with hazard tree removal.