



Office of the People's Counsel  
ADVOCACY | EDUCATION | PROTECTION



**March 2023**

## **A Note from Your People's Counsel Sandra Mattavous-Frye**



### **Our Planet, Our Future**

The countdown is on for Earth Day 2023, marking the 53rd anniversary of the birth of the modern environmental movement.

On April 22, billions of people in the United States and around the world will rally around this year's theme: "Invest in Our Planet." Concerned communities will raise awareness and take action to move toward a greener and more sustainable planet, and address climate change.

Close to home, OPC is excited to invite all to "**Our Planet, Our Future: An OPC Climate Summit to Empower Youth & DC Communities.**" It will take place on Saturday, April 29, from 10:30 am to 3:30 pm, at Catholic University's Pryzbyla University Center. The summit is a follow up to OPC's first community conversation

on climate change in 2021. The gathering will empower youth to find their role, to use their voice, and to inspire action in tackling a concern affecting our neighborhoods and our world. While the target audience will be youth and young adults, we urge environmental stakeholders and DC residents of all ages to attend. You can register for Our Planet, Our Future today! Click on the image below or scan the QR code.

We look forward to seeing you on April 29 as we all work together to find solutions to the climate crisis.



## Beam Me up Scotty? OPC Says No and Successfully Challenges Unproven Gas Leak Technology



OPC has won a victory for Washington Gas Light consumers. On March 10, the DC Public Service Commission issued an order denying WGL's request to charge ratepayers for the use of unproven satellite technology in its Advanced Leak Detection (ALD) pilot program. The pilot program is supposed to identify methane gas leaks from WGL's pipes.

The \$1.4 million ALD pilot was first approved as part of the Projectpipes 2 gas line replacement project. Projectpipes 2 allows WGL to proactively replace pipes at-risk for leaks and recover the costs for those replacements through a surcharge on customer

bills. The ALD pilot was to use sensors mounted on vehicles to detect gas leaks and gather data, along with traditional leak detection methods.

However, without seeking permission, WGL decided to switch from vehicle mounted sensors to the technology of a company known as Satelytics that utilized satellite-imaging to detect leaks. Unlike vehicle mounted sensors, which have an established track-record, there was no evidence that the satellite technology was effective in an urban environment such as the District. As it became apparent that there were issues with the accuracy and timeliness of leak detection using Satelytics, OPC and other parties raised concerns. OPC argued that satellite technology was not approved under the pilot and opposed consumers footing the bill.

The Commission agreed and ordered WGL to use the approved vehicle mounted sensors and to file bi-monthly reports for the remainder of the gas leak detection pilot. The DC government also performed a leak detection survey of WGL's pipes using vehicle mounted sensors, and WGL is now required to repair those leaks identified under that survey as well.

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## **OPC Questions PSC Decision in Washington Gas Rate Hike Case**

On March 24, OPC filed a motion with the DC Public Service Commission asking the Commission to reverse its decision to cancel evidentiary hearings in the Washington Gas rate increase case and replace them with "legislative style" hearings. Long standing legal precedent has sanctioned evidentiary hearings in rate cases where parties are disputing the facts. OPC disagrees with the Commission's finding that the dozens of issues OPC and other parties have raised about WGL's request for a \$53 million increase in rates are merely issues of policy rather than issues of fact that warrant an evidentiary hearing.

In November 2022, OPC [urged](#) the Commission to reject \$45.2 million of WGL's huge, proposed rate increase and called on the PSC to closely examine the impact the rate increase will have on the most financially vulnerable DC consumers.

OPC's most recent motion addresses the following concerns:

- The Commission denied OPC's request to provide

“surrebuttal testimony,” which is the response to WGL’s rebuttal. The failure to allow either an evidentiary hearing or surrebuttal testimony is particularly damaging to consumers because the utility’s rebuttal filing is massive and includes new and significant issues. It also introduces several new witnesses for whom OPC has not been given an opportunity to question.

- A legislative hearing would allow the opinions of WGL witnesses to be entered into the record without any OPC cross-examination. Denying OPC the right to question the gas company’s witnesses under oath is a denial of DC consumers’ right to due process. OPC challenges the Commission’s contention that it does not need cross-examination to decide the accuracy and credibility of WGL’s witnesses.

OPC believes this case needs more scrutiny, not less, and calls on the Commission to grant OPC's motion to ensure the development of a full and sustainable evidentiary record upon which it can make a reasoned decision.

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## **People's Counsel on Deck at the Council**

People's Counsel Sandra Mattavous-Frye testified on the progress OPC made on its Fiscal Year 2022 goals before the DC Council Committee on Business and Economic Development during OPC's annual agency performance oversight hearing on March 1.

First, a series of public witnesses praised OPC's advocacy for utility consumers and leadership on climate and clean energy issues as they affect utility services. Fast forward about 1:50:00 on this [link](#) to see the testimony from public witnesses.

The People's Counsel shared, among other points, how OPC continues to help consumers adjust to the post-pandemic challenges, including increased utility service disconnections.

A key portion of the People's Counsel's comments concerned how OPC must ensure that equity is considered when decisions are made. For example, she emphasized that utility spending to modernize their infrastructure to meet our climate change goals must also ensure that the resulting benefits are shared with communities of color and underserved consumers. Watch the People's Counsel's testimony [here](#).

Next up, People's Counsel Mattavous-Frye will outline OPC's FY 2024 budget request at the Council on April 5. Monitor OPC and Council social media for links to watch live.

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## Moving Toward a Lead-Free DC

OPC's Water Services Division is tracking DC Council legislation designed to get the lead out of DC Water pipes to improve the health of District residents. Health problems

linked to elevated levels of lead include lead poisoning in children, fatigue, high blood pressure, and memory loss.

Specifically, councilmembers are considering the "Lead-Free DC [Omnibus](#) Amendment Act of 2023" and the "[Green New Deal](#)" for a Lead-Free DC Amendment Act of 2023. If passed, the Green New Deal would amend previous law to establish a program operated by DC Water and the Department of Energy and Environment to require the removal of lead service lines from public and private property and all District government buildings by January 1, 2030. The omnibus bill would require lead pipe replacement on private and public property.

### Do You Have Lead Piping?

Consumers can use a Lead Test Kit to determine if lead is in their water or visit the DC Water [lead map](#) to see if your property has a lead water service line. The map will display whether there is a lead line on public and/or private land.

DC Water operates several programs for lead service line replacement. The programs are initiated either by DC Water or by the customer. Click this [link](#) to learn more about the programs and determine which would be right for your household.

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## Did You Know? DC Government Offers a Potpourri of Savings Programs for Energy & Home Expenses

OPC believes it's important to remind some DC consumers and make others aware of various District government programs that could help you save energy and money on heating and cooling bills, reduce the cost of major appliance purchases, install weatherization measures, benefit from HVAC and electric lawn care rebates, property tax exemptions, aging in-place modifications, and the list goes on and on! Some programs are income based while others are open to all households.



**Get in the know by clicking the links below:**

Weatherization Assistance Program: [DOEE](#)

Rebates for appliance purchases: [DCSEU](#)

Free Solar roof installation: [DOEE Solar for All](#)

Free Solar subscription energy credits: Solar for All [@Groundswell](#)

Property Tax Deductions: [Office of Tax & Revenue](#)

Safe at Home: Department of Aging & [Community Living](#)

Home Purchase Assistance Program: [DHCD](#)

Home rehabilitation assistance: [DHCD](#)

Money management & free tax preparation: [Capital Area Asset Builders](#)

OPC can help utility consumers determine what programs might be best for their household. Call (202) 727-3071. Also call 311 for referrals. Now You Know!!!

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## OPC Working for You In Working Groups at the PSC

Continuing with our series on OPC participation in working groups before the Public Service Commission, this month we feature the Utility Discount Program (UDP) Education Working Group.



The UDP Working Group is comprised of OPC, Washington Gas, Pepco, the Department of Energy & Environment, DC Water, and PSC staff. The group is responsible for implementing a consumer

education program that highlights the discounts available to low-income consumers of the four utilities, for the purpose of increasing and retaining enrollment.

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## **Employee Spotlight: Larry Hicks is Working to Keep OPC Running**

OPC's Operations Division plays a major part in the functions of the agency. And with the Office's recent relocation, it took a key player to help ensure things continued to run smoothly. Enter Program Analyst Larry Hicks to help facilitate a smooth transition.

Now that the move is completed, Larry' is serving as OPC's training coordinator and fleet manager.

The Baltimore native graduated from the University of California-Berkley with a bachelor's degree in political science. Larry calls himself an adventurous person and was a member of the Baltimore City College Senior High School's Varsity Cross-Country Team when they won the Maryland Scholastic Association Cross-Country Championship.

An entrepreneur, Larry opened his first business, a telecommunications consulting company, in 1983. He also worked in the financial services industry and remains committed to advancing financial literacy.

Prior to coming to OPC, Larry's positions included Chief Compliance Officer for the DC Sustainable Energy Utility, general manager in the hospitality industry and Director of the Office of Career Services at the University of the District of Columbia.

In his free time, Larry enjoys gardening. After five months with OPC, he is anxious to grow within the agency.

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## **Women's History Month Stars**

As Women's History Month wraps up, the OPC Connection is spotlighting OPC staff members who are leaders, trailblazers or

have received noteworthy recognition.

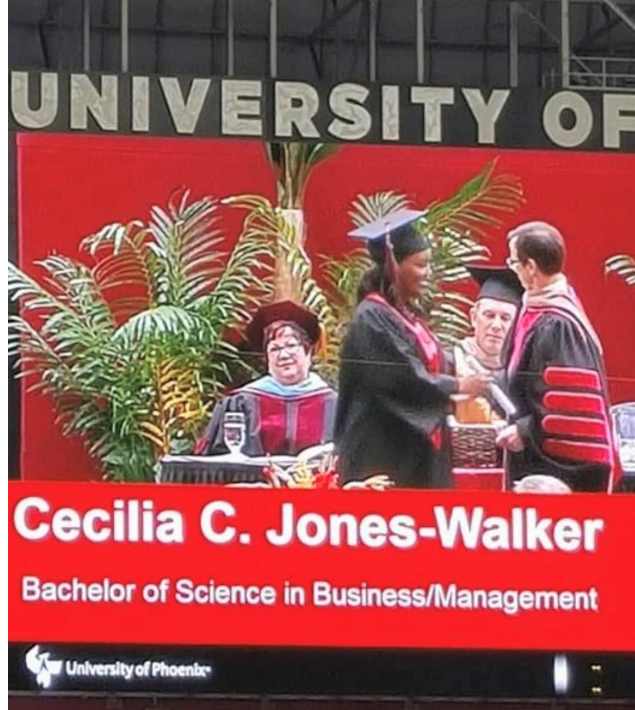


At the top of the list are People's Counsel Sandra Mattavous-Frye and Deputy People's Counsel Karen Sistrunk. They are the leaders who have guided OPC to be recognized as one of the nation's premier consumer advocacy agencies.



Kintéshia Scott is the first lawyer in her family. The Assistant People's Counsel says she is very passionate about environmental and energy justice, among other concerns. Kintéshia holds a B.S. in Environmental Science, Master of Energy Regulation of Law, and a Juris Doctor, a feat she achieved at the age of twenty-three. The South Carolina native says her Gullah Geechee and Trinidadian heritage upbringing provided her with the foundation to strive for success.





Cecilia Jones-Walker, OPC's Human Resources Manager, is the first family member on her mother's side to earn a four-year college degree. Cecilia graduated from the University of Phoenix, where she majored in business administration with a concentration in human resources. Her passion for helping people excel and providing valuable employment information is what landed her in the human resources field. "Furthering my education was the best decision I could have made," Cecilia proudly reflects.



Public Information Officer Doxie McCoy skated her way into the history books at her alma mater, Boston College. She was the first Black female ice hockey player. A player on the varsity field hockey and volleyball teams in the seventies, Doxie is believed to be the first Black woman athlete at Boston College. Earlier this year, BC's athletics department recognized her on the field during a football game. See this article: "[First and Foremost](#)"



Cherry Belle, OPC's Administrative Officer, has been recognized for writing Christian poetry. Here is an excerpt from "Selfless."

*Are you willing to show kindness and be a blessing to someone else? Will you show compassion to a hurting brother or sister putting their needs above yourself?*

Check out Cherry on [YouTube](#).

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### ***Look Who Celebrated a Birthday this Month at OPC!***

*Nick Gumer ~ March 1  
Dwayne Houston ~ March 12  
Jean Gross-Bethel ~ March 21  
CharQuia Barringtine ~ March 29*



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## **OPC In Your Neighborhood!**

OPC looks forward to seeing you in-person. We welcome the opportunity to speak at your Advisory Neighborhood Commission, civic association or community group meeting onsite or virtually. We can give updates on utility issues, trends, and outline how we serve you. Call (202) 727-3071 if your group would like our staff to make a presentation onsite or "Zoom in." Contact the organizations directly if you would like links to attend any of the meetings we'll be visiting virtually.

Greater Washington Hispanic Chamber of Commerce  
Business Expo  
Monday, April 24  
11:00 am - 2:00 pm  
Walter E. Washington Convention Center

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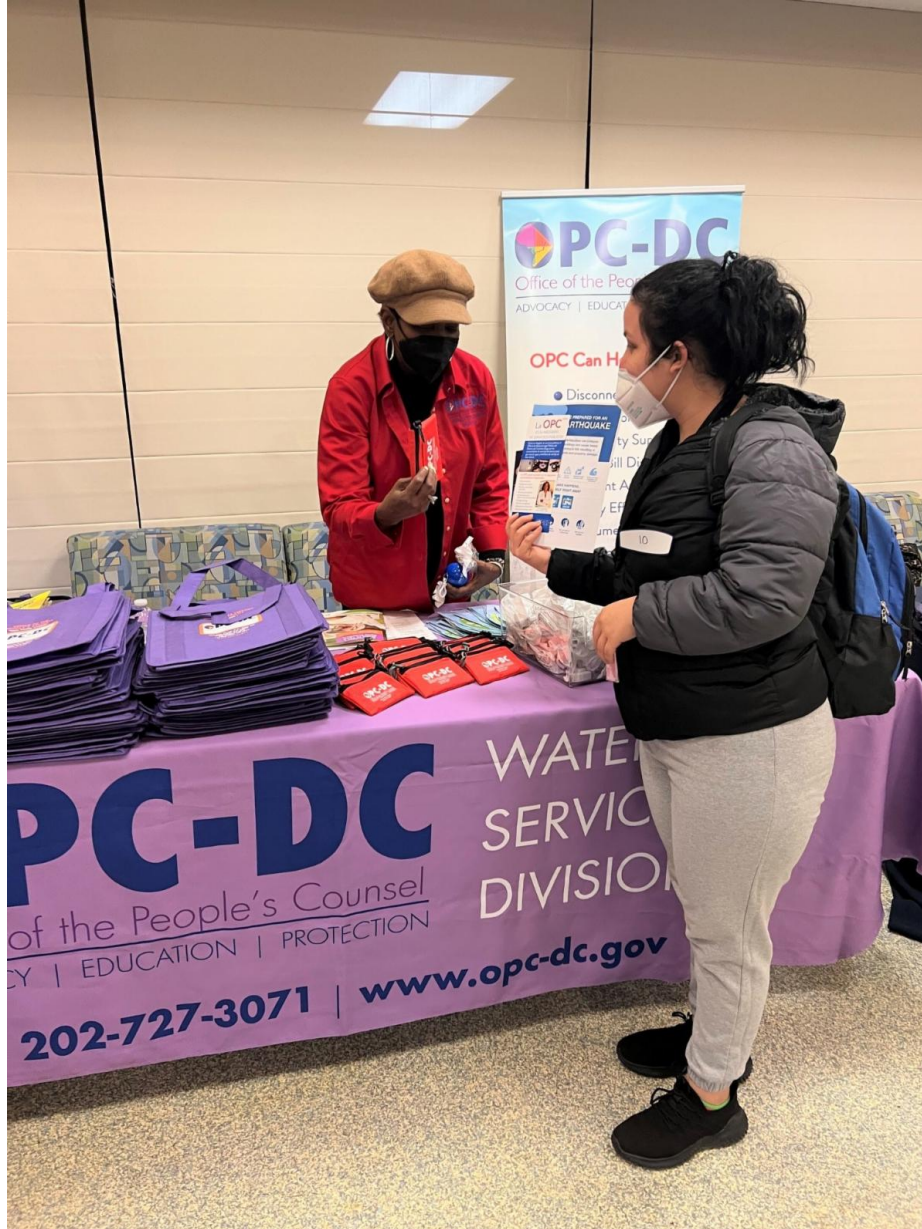
## **Photo Gallery**



OPC's Jean Gross-Bethel, far right, participates with other DC agency staff on a neighborhood walk hosted by the Department of Aging & Community Living.



OPC's Denise Blackson, with a consumer at the Department of Human Services, stands ready to assist DC residents with utility service and billing issues.



Valca Valentine of OPC's Water Services Division speaks with a visitor at Howard University about OPC's services for DC Water consumers.

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## Connect With OPC!

Do you have feedback or an idea for an article that could be featured in an upcoming edition of the OPC Connection? We want to hear from you! Just drop our editorial team an email @ [info@opc-dc.gov](mailto:info@opc-dc.gov) or tweet us [@DCOPC](https://twitter.com/DCOPC).

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