



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



August 2023

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

High Complaint Numbers Tell a Big Story

A core responsibility of the Office of the People's Counsel is to assist DC consumers who have complaints or concerns about their utilities or need help to keep their services running. Through summer breaks, fall days, winter times, thick and thin, OPC is always "on the case." In fact, since fiscal year 2023 began in October, through August 11, our Consumer and Water Services Divisions have handled an unprecedented 3,551 consumer complaints and concerns—and there are still six weeks remaining in FY 23. That historically high number of cases compares to 3,333 during the entire FY 22.



Consumers have reached out to OPC primarily because their electric, gas, water, or telephone utilities have been disconnected, are at risk of being shut off, or they need bill payment assistance. Behind these numbers are many families and individuals in dire straits. Therefore, I am grateful to the dedicated OPC staff who are sensitive to consumer needs, passionate about their work, and persistent in getting complaints resolved.

As I highlight OPC's crucial work, I remind consumers who are having a problem with their utility services to act sooner than later. Don't wait to apply for financial assistance. With a new fiscal year beginning October 1, consumers currently receiving aid will need to reapply. Here's the [link](#).

If you are behind on your utility bills, or have a complaint against a utility company, don't hesitate to contact the Office of the People's Counsel at (202) 727-3071. We stand ready to advocate, educate, and protect!

Connecting Consumers with the Latest on Washington Gas & Pepco Plans to Raise Your Rates



Consumer advocates like OPC must grapple with the intricate dance of balancing our efforts to ensure fair rates for consumers while being mindful that utilities must remain financially viable. OPC is currently litigating two important rate cases in which Washington Gas and Pepco seek to increase customer rates. The stakes are high, with potentially far-reaching consequences for consumers, businesses, and the broader economic landscape of the District of Columbia. The Public Service Commission recently outlined the path forward for the two cases.

The Washington Gas case is in the final stages. The utility, OPC and other parties are required to submit initial briefs by September 1. This submission will serve as a foundation for subsequent oral arguments scheduled for September 13, allowing for an exchange of perspectives on how natural gas rates should be set. The culmination of this process will be the filing of final briefs by October 11. The Commission will examine the entire record to render a decision, most likely in January 2024.

The Pepco rate case is a bit more complicated. The Commission has set a schedule that puts three distinct Pepco applications under evaluation simultaneously. The first application is an examination of the performance of a new ratemaking model approved three years ago on a pilot basis. The second application is a new three-year ratemaking proposal. The third application takes a more traditional route, in which rates are set for just one year.

Parties are required to submit testimony on October 16. A hearing has been set for January 22, 2024, and briefs are due on February 16. The Commission will issue a final decision in May 2024. OPC will file a request for reconsideration asking the Commission to establish a new schedule that will first evaluate the performance of the previous three-year rate plan and then have Pepco file either a traditional one-year rate increase or another three-year plan.

If this all sounds complicated, rest assured, OPC will navigate through all the weeds to ensure DC consumers are protected and we will aggressively argue for a fair and reasonable outcome.



The Water Connection

OPC is Advocating for DC Water Consumers on Multiple Fronts

OPC wants you to know about the following actions our Water Services Division has taken for the benefit of DC Water consumers:

- DC Water has added a feature onto its website so that customers will have a clearer and more direct process to file a water bill dispute online. OPC has long advocated for this modification on behalf of water consumers.
- OPC provided comments to the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Science Advisory Board on the inclusion of the relative burden of utility payment costs as a measurement to identify and allocate resources to communities impacted by environmental injustice. Based upon reactions during the DC Water Board's recent hearing, the Science Advisory Board is likely to implement OPC's recommendation.

- OPC provided comments on EPA's regulation of coal ash residuals resulting from coal-generated energy. The residuals have the potential to contaminate the Potomac River due to several inoperable or aging coal ash retention sites upstream. The Potomac is DC Water's sole source of our drinking water.



OPC Employee of the Month CharQuia Barringtine= A Job *Well* Done!

Consumer Services Specialist CharQuia Barringtine is the OPC Employee of the Month. CharQuia is recognized for reviving and leading the agency's Wellness Committee after it was dormant for months. She has begun planning wellness walks for staff.

In noting CharQuia's accomplishments, People's Counsel Sandra Mattavous-Frye recalled that she began her tour of duty in 2015 as a receptionist in a temporary position and was promoted to a permanent position in December 2017. OPC thanks CharQuia for a job *well* done. Employees of the month are nominated by fellow staffers.

OPC Connecting at the PSC



**OPC is Advocating for Consumers in the
Following Cases:**

PEPACR2022-01-E: Pepco's Consolidated Report; Formal Case No. 1119: The Joint Application of Exelon Corporation, Pepco Holdings, Inc., Exelon Energy Delivery Company, LLC, and New Special Purpose Entity, LLC for Authorization and Approval of Proposed Merger Transaction

On July 21, OPC filed comments in this matter, making 15 recommendations related to how Pepco reports system losses and forecasting for the next year.

Formal Case No. 1169: The Application of Washington Gas Light Company for Authority to Increase Existing Rates and Charges

On August 4, OPC filed conformed direct, rebuttal & surrebuttal testimonies in the rate case.

CC9075265, Brisbane v. Washington Gas Light Company

On August 11, OPC filed a brief on behalf of the consumer who lodged a complaint against Washington Gas. The matter involved a consumer not wanting Washington Gas to enter their property to update their gas equipment.

PEPRADR-2023-01: Pepco's Compliance Filing for Rider "RADS" – Residential Aid Discount Surcharge

On August 15, OPC filed a motion to leave and comments in this matter. After reviewing Pepco's proposed tariffs, OPC identified two issues in the proposal and requested the PSC to prevent Pepco from implementing them. One, Pepco should not be allowed to alter the methodology it uses to estimate costs associated with the RAD surcharge without Commission approval. Two, Pepco should not unilaterally decide the amount of revenue needed to support the surcharge without additional investigation by or input from the Commission.

OPC In Your Neighborhood!

OPC welcomes opportunities to speak at your Advisory Neighborhood Commission, civic association or community group activity or meeting onsite or virtually. We can give updates on utility issues, trends, and outline how we serve DC consumers. Call (202) 727-3071 if your group would like our staff to make a presentation onsite or "Zoom in." Where applicable, contact the organizations directly if you would

like links to attend any of the meetings we'll be visiting virtually.

Park(ing) Day 2023 Pop Up Park
Friday, September 15
9:00 am - 7:00 pm
Tend Navy Yard parking lot
250 M Street SE

Tabling with the Public Service Commission
Wednesday, September 20
3:00 pm - 6:00 pm
Tenley Friendship Library
4450 Wisconsin Avenue NW

Penn Branch Chapter AARP Presentation
Tuesday, September 26
11:00 am - 1:00 pm
St. Timothy's Episcopal Church
3601 Alabama Avenue SE

Dialogue on Diversity
Thursday, September 28
10:00 am - 3:00 pm
UnidosUS
1126 16th Street NW

Photo Gallery



Congratulations to OPC interns for completing the Marion Barry Summer Youth Employment Program at our agency. From left: Human Resource Specialist Rakisha Philson, Intern Malik Salter, Intern Chloe Bryant, People's Counsel Sandra Mattavous-Frye, Intern Tanisha Tuckson, and Human Resources Officer Cecilia Jones-Walker.



These children are happy to receive backpacks OPC gave away at a back to school carnival hosted by the Resident Council Presidents of the James Creek/Syphax Gardens/Greenleaf



Deputy People's Counsel Karen Sistrunk discusses community engagement best practices on a panel at the RE+ Mid-Atlantic Conference.



Energy Efficiency Outreach Specialist Denise Blackson uses coloring books & other kid-friendly materials to conduct EE workshops for children at the Bethel Christian Fellowship Summer Camp in Southeast.



Consumer Outreach Specialist Marchim Williams Sr. mans a table at a DC agency resource fair hosted by At-Large DC Councilmember Kenyan McDuffie in Ward 5.

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 or tweet us [@DCOPC](https://twitter.com/DCOPC).

OPC Connection Editorial Team:

Doxie McCoy, Phillip Harmon, Quaneisha Glover, Chawndise Battle,

Dwayne Houston, Valca Valentine

Contributors:

Sandra Mattavous-Frye, Karen Sistrunk, Laurence Daniels,
Stephen Dudek, Denise Blackson,
Adam Carlesco, Jason Starks, Marchim Williams Sr.

The Office of the People's Counsel, 655 15th Street NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20005 | Tel: (202) 727-3071 | Fax: (202) 727-1014 |
TTY-TTD: (202) 727-2876
www.opc-dc.gov | info@opc-dc.gov

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Office of the People's Counsel | 655 15th Street NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005

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