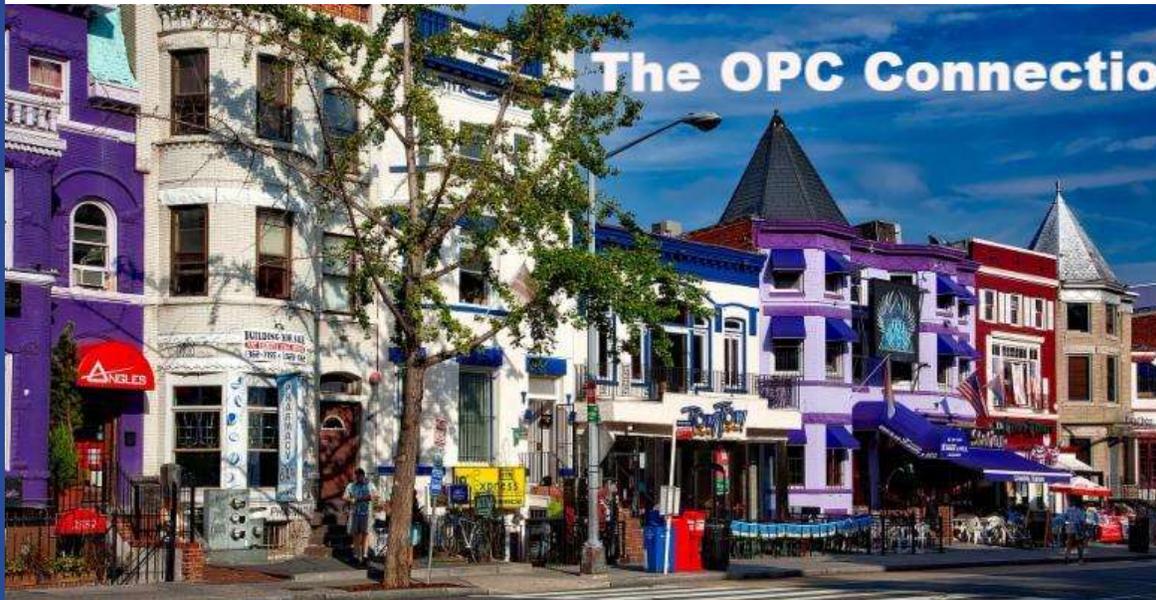




Office of the People's Counsel
ADVOCACY | EDUCATION | PROTECTION



March 2024

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

**Springing into New
Beginnings**

Spring has sprung and many people view the start of spring as a time for new beginnings. As I



embark on my fourth term as your People's Counsel, I am excited about new beginnings.

On March 5, the DC Council gave unanimous approval to my reappointment to another four-year term. I appreciate the Council's confidence in my abilities to continue leading the Office of the People's Counsel. And I am grateful for Mayor Muriel Bowser's nomination for me to remain at the helm of this critical District agency.

I outlined my vision for this new era at my confirmation hearing before the Council. I emphasized that we must face the realities of climate change and other industry developments in the utility regulatory process. I stated my intentions to develop innovative strategies and build new alliances while continuing to aggressively defend consumer rights. In addition, I will be laser-focused on engaging DC youth in conversations about climate change and facilitating their input in shaping the epic changes their generation will likely encounter.

I will continue to champion the District's environmental and sustainable energy policies and ambitious clean air goals and; at the same time, ensure equity and affordability, particularly for low-income utility residents, as new players, new utility business models, and technological advances emerge.

Amid these changes, the fundamental entitlement to safe, reliable, and affordable utility service is absolute. With innovative and creative resolutions to modern utility challenges, working to achieve tangible and measurable victories for consumers will continue to be the cornerstone of OPC's bully pulpit. With my talented, dedicated staff, and curious and committed community partners, I am confident OPC's legacy of past accomplishments will guide us on the path to many more wins for consumers in the District of Columbia.

ICYMI: OPC's Take On Environmental Justice Legislation

In case you missed it, Deputy People's Counsel Karen Sistrunk appeared before the DC Council Committee on Transportation & the Environment on March 18 to give OPC's perspective on the Environmental Justice Amendment Act. According to Ward 5 Councilmember Zachary Parker, the bill's lead sponsor, facilities that produce air pollution and hazardous waste are concentrated in low-income and predominantly Black neighborhoods in the District such as Ivy City and Brentwood. The bill seeks relief for these communities by establishing a "cumulative impact statement" process that must be completed for facilities to obtain permits and would enforce other environmental protections for overburdened communities.

The legislation calls for OPC to play a role in the environmental review process. In her testimony, Deputy People's Counsel Sistrunk states that OPC supports the act's expansion of the scope of environmental reviews but has concerns about the expansion of OPC's authority and responsibilities. OPC appreciates the Council's focus on enhancing environmental justice reviews for facility permits and recognizes the necessity of cumulative impact statements in safeguarding impacted communities from ongoing and compounding environmental harms. However, OPC is concerned about the current lack of funding and capacity to effectively take on the role proposed in the legislation in its current form.

Nonetheless, OPC is ready to work with the Council to help ensure environmental justice issues are addressed. See

Sistrunk's full testimony, fast-forward about 5:58:00 on this [link](#).

Keeping You in the Know on Pepco's Move to Raise Your Rates



On March 12, OPC submitted a joint motion requesting that the Public Service Commission reject the multiyear rate plan (MRP) Pepco submitted in Formal Case No. 1176. The Motion to Dismiss, or in the Alternative, Motion for Summary Judgment, argues that the MRP, which would result in consecutive years of rate hikes for residential ratepayers if approved, is deficient and premature. Joining the motion was the DC government and the Apartment and Office Building Association of Metropolitan Washington. Multiyear rate plans are a form of alternative ratemaking that represents a stark departure from the traditional process of setting rates.

OPC views Pepco's proposal as problematic as there are no performance incentive mechanisms in place. These mechanisms provide incentives or impose penalties on the utility to make sure investments consumers ultimately pay are advancing public policy initiatives such as clean energy goals.

Additionally, while Pepco argues that the MRP will help modernize the grid and help the District reach its climate targets, the investments in the plan appear as typical investments that any utility would make. Moreover, OPC argues that Pepco has failed to show that the previous multiyear rate plan pilot program approved in Formal Case 1156 provided net benefits to ratepayers. Stay tuned, as OPC will keep consumers in the know on this important case.

Let Your Voice Be Heard Before Your Electric Bill Goes Up!



The Public Service Commission is hosting community hearings to receive public comment on Pepco's rate increase request of \$190.7 million over three years in Formal Case No.1176. OPC encourages consumers to participate as this huge rate increase is under consideration.

If you wish to testify at a community hearing, contact the Commission Secretary by 5:00 pm, three business days before the date of the hearing via email at psc-commissionsecretary@dc.gov or phone (202) 626-5150. The Commission requests that persons needing reasonable accommodations or language interpretation contact the PSC seven days before the date of the hearing. Non-English speakers must contact the Commission Secretary by the close of business, five business days before the hearing. See the dates and places below. All hearings will begin at 5:30 pm.

Tuesday, April 2
Lamond-Riggs/Lillian J. Huff Library
5401 South Dakota Avenue NE

Wednesday, April 3 *Hybrid in-person or virtual participation
DC Public Service Commission Hearing Room
1325 G Street NW, 8th Floor

If you are unable to attend a hearing, you may submit written testimony to the Commission no later than April 26, 2024, via

email at psc-commissionsecretary@dc.gov or through the [DCPSC E-Docket System](#).

Contact OPC at (202) 727-3071 or info@opc-dc.gov if you'd like technical assistance in preparing your testimony.



OPC WSD Monitoring Bill Assistance Programs for Low-income Water Consumers

Supporters of programs that could help DC Water customers pay their water and sewer bills are making waves in Congress. OPC welcomes the recent introduction of a Senate bill to permanently fund the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) for eligible water customers nationwide. Now under consideration in a Senate committee, LIHWAP would be in line with the federal Low-Income Household Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

The congressional action comes as OPC's Water Services Division consistently hears from DC Water customers who are still catching up paying bill balances sometimes into thousands of dollars that piled up during the pandemic. WSD helps them navigate the intricacies of utility assistance programs to prevent disconnection or restore this vital service.

As the pandemic was winding down in January of 2022, bill payment programs like LIHWAP were created and immediately made a significant impact. However, the funding dried up in six months. The supply was gone but the demand remained high.

Within a few months, DC Water created the Residential Assistance Program (RAP) to fill the gap. However, the benefits were less than half those of LIHWAP. While a portion of the demand for assistance is being addressed through RAP, there is still a need for a permanent well-funded program.

DC Water is in the process of replacing RAP with a more incentive-based assistance program for consumers who meet new guidelines. The details of the program will be forthcoming as the funding for RAP will be depleted soon. OPC will keep you posted on the developments locally and nationally. In the meantime, see DC Water customer assistance programs [here](#).

OPC Comments on Rules for Getting Rid of Harmful Emissions

In recent comments to the Environmental Protection Agency, OPC expressed support for new federal rules targeting large methane emissions from the oil and gas industry facilities. These rules are part of the federal Inflation Reduction Act's changes to the Clean Air Act, focusing on a new Waste Emissions Charge for major methane emitters. OPC is actively advocating to ensure that while these companies are held accountable for their emissions, the financial burden of paying for compliance doesn't fall unfairly on utility customers.



To protect consumers, OPC recommends that the EPA limit how much of the compliance costs can be passed through to ratepayers, and at the same time ensure narrow exceptions and robust enforcement. OPC is also urging there be clear and transparent mechanisms that show how these costs are

recovered in utility rates. Additionally, OPC recommends further assistance for low-income gas customers who might be disproportionately affected by these additional charges on the gas industry. Collaboration with state regulatory bodies is essential to implement these changes effectively.

OPC also believes consumer education programs are needed to help consumers understand these changes and their impact on utility services and rates. Our goal is to balance environmental responsibilities with fair and equitable cost distribution, ensuring a sustainable yet affordable energy system for all DC residents.

Employee of the Month: Bryan Rhoades

Here's what a colleague had to say in nominating Bryan Rhoades for OPC Employee of the Month:

"Since arriving about a year ago, Bryan has consistently demonstrated exceptional performance and a great attitude in his role as an IT specialist in our Operations Division. His hard work and dedication have significantly impacted the IT team and contributed to OPC's mission and mandate.



"Bryan has played an instrumental role in setting up new laptops for staff. Everyone can agree that Bryan has taken OPC video production to a whole new level. For example, he's had a hand in developing videos on the Youth Climate Summit, office celebrations, and OPC's new "[Utility Notes Series](#)."

"He is a true asset to our agency, and we are confident he will continue to make a positive impact."



OPC is Advocating for Consumers in the Following Cases:

Formal Case No. 1176: Pepco's Application for Authority to Implement a Multiyear Rate Plan

On March 12, OPC filed a Motion of Enlargement of Time. With this motion, a new procedural schedule would be created. OPC also filed a joint motion with the DC government and the Apartment and Office Building Association asking the PSC to dismiss Pepco's Application for Approval of the Multiyear Rate Plan and the Limited Scope of the Traditional Test Year filing.

Come out to the DC Armory on Saturday, April 6, to meet OPC staff at the Healthy Homes Fair. For more information, see healthyhomesfair.org.



SATURDAY APRIL 6
9am-12pm *professionals* + 12pm-5pm *general public*

50+ EXHIBITORS / COOKING DEMONSTRATIONS / APPLIANCE "PETTING ZOO"

What is the Healthy Homes Fair?

The [Healthy Homes Fair](#) is a full-day event and expo to increase awareness of products and services and accelerate the decarbonization of the homes of DC residents, especially in underserved communities. The Fair will be organized and hosted by Electrify DC in partnership with the DC Department of Energy and Environment, the DC Department of Buildings, and national, regional and local institutions.

[Electrify DC](#) is a new regional organization that is accelerating electrification by transforming the residential real estate market and the professions that serve it. Electrify DC brings together real estate professionals, contractors of all kinds, government agencies, and the public to showcase the cost savings, health and climate benefits of electrification through education, training and advocacy.

Who is the Healthy Homes Fair for?

Everyone! In addition to homeowners and renters, the Fair's 1000+ attendees will include 200+ members of 14 professions linked to residential real estate, and anyone interested in the benefits of electrification. The afternoon programming is designed to appeal to homeowners and renters, including families, seniors, and women and youth interested in workforce opportunities. Activities for children and interpretation services will be available. Primarily targeted at residents of the District, the Fair will also attract homeowners and service providers from across the DMV region as the District heavily relies on these businesses for its residential construction and retrofit needs.

Electrify DC | 2505 17th St NE, Washington, DC 20018 | EIN 92-3933459 | electrifydc.org

OPC In Your Neighborhood!

OPC welcomes opportunities to speak at your Advisory Neighborhood Commission, civic association, community group activity, or meeting, either onsite or virtually. We can give updates on utility issues, and trends, and highlight how we serve DC consumers. Call (202) 727-3071 if your group would like our staff to make an onsite or virtual presentation. Scheduled appearances are below.

ANC6D Business Meeting
OPC Presentation on PROJECTpipes
Virtual
Monday, April 8
7:00 pm- 9:00 pm

Northwest One Library
Information Distribution
155 L Street NW
Wednesday, April 17
10:00 am- 3:00 pm

Photo Gallery



Valca Valentine and Rusheeda Boyd, OPC Consumer Outreach Specialists, share tips on water bill discount programs at the Ward 4 Mini-Commission on Aging monthly meeting.



The women of OPC gather in observance of Women's History Month.



People's Counsel Sandra Mattavous-Frye, OPC staff members, and DC women's group leaders attend a Women's History

Month forum at the University of the District of Columbia Law School featuring former US Attorney General Loretta Lynch. The People's Counsel is a graduate of UDC Law.

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

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