

Good Afternoon. Thank you for allowing me 5 minutes to provide testimony in support of restoring the budget of the Ohio Consumer Counsel's (OCC). My name is Sue Steigerwald, and I am an all electric home owner and founder of the grass roots organization CKAP, or Citizens for Keeping the All Electric Promise.

In my opinion, there are no legitimate reasons to cut the OCC's budget, however, two potential reasons have been suggested. The first reason would be save Ohio Taxpayer's money and to help balance the State Budget. As I'm sure you've heard many times by now, the OCC's budget is not funded by tax dollars but rather is funded entirely from utility company assessments. Therefore, cutting the OCC's budget would not help balance the State Budget or save Ohio taxpayer's any money. The second potential reason given regarding the cut in OCC's budget would be to reduce a duplication of services. Some have suggested the OCC and the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) serve the same function, and dispelling this rumor is what I will spend the remainder of my time discussing.

I can stand here and tell you all day long that the OCC and the PUCO do not duplicate services, however, I thought it would be much more effective if I relayed to you my first hand experience on this topic. By doing so, I hope you will better understand, as I do, that the two organizations serve equally important, yet completely different functions.

I was thrust into the confusing world of public utility rules and regulations when I opened my January 2010 electric bill and found it to be about \$150 higher than it should have been. Completely bewildered, I called FirstEnergy only to be told that my all electric discount rate had been removed. I still remember asking the customer services representative if that alone could have caused my bill to increase a whopping 60%, and the representative matter-of-factly telling me "yes."

Still acting as an individual homeowner, I agreed to testify at a hearing in the House Consumer Protection Committee Chaired by Rep. Lundy in February 2010 that was held to investigate the rate shock experienced by all electric homeowners. Members of the OCC and the PUCO Staff were at the hearing too. Although the PUCO Staff did not offer any assistance, the OCC Staff reached out to me and offered to help me in any way possible. From that point on, I began to work very closely with the OCC.

Shortly after testifying at the legislative hearing, I began to organize other consumers via an email list into the group we now call CKAP, with over

2,700 members. I knew absolutely nothing about the regulatory process or how electric rates were set. In order to educate myself, I asked the OCC staff hundreds of questions about the process. They responded to every single one of my questions. More importantly, the OCC's call center assisted hundreds of other all-electric homeowners in understanding the issue and their bills, and heard the cries and listened to the fears of the numerous all electric homeowners that contacted them.

As a result, on February 25, 2010, the OCC filed a "Motion for a Declaration of Emergency" on behalf of the all electric consumers, and shortly thereafter, then Governor Strickland intervened and asked the PUCO to mitigate the rate shock. This was done with a temporary reinstatement of the all electric discount, but CKAP and the OCC quickly began hearing from consumers who were "left out" and didn't get the discount reinstated. Again, the OCC filed a "Motion for Clarification" on behalf of those who were left out, and the Governor followed up again by asking the PUCO to correct this situation.

By May of 2010, I was heavily involved in leading CKAP and decided that in addition to having a relationship with the OCC, perhaps I should also have a similar relationship with the PUCO. I reached out to the PUCO staff, and they were very cordial to me and answered any questions I had during the month of May. However, on June 2, CKAP filed a "Motion to Intervene" in the all electric case, and suddenly everything changed. The PUCO staff very politely told me that any further questions I had would need to be asked through my attorney, essentially saying I was "cut off" as a consumer from help from the PUCO.

There have been hundreds of formal utility complaints filed in recent years by consumers with the PUCO, so I assume that this means they are "cut off" from any communication with the PUCO staff, too. So herein lays the crux of my argument to you. The PUCO removes itself from consumers in utility cases. Therefore, it is vitally important for consumers to be able to turn to the OCC, their advocate, for help. Obviously, the OCC and the PUCO are not duplicating efforts, but are busy fulfilling their own unique missions: The OCC is serving the consumer, and the PUCO is acting as the judge and jury on cases between consumers and the utility companies.

The OCC has been extremely helpful to me and CKAP's attorney in the all-electric case. Regulatory litigation is extremely complex, and CKAP's attorney and I would have been completely lost without the help of the OCC. I urge you to restore the funding to the OCC's budget to the current budget level so they can continue to serve Ohio's utility consumers in ways that the PUCO cannot.