



# OLR RESEARCH REPORT

February 10, 2012

2012-R-0108

## QUESTIONS FOR CONSUMER COUNSEL NOMINEE

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### CONSUMER COUNSEL (CGS § 16-2a)

The consumer counsel heads the Office of Consumer Counsel (OCC), which advocates for consumer interests in all matters that may affect Connecticut consumers with respect to utility companies, electric suppliers, and certified telecommunications providers. OCC may appear and participate in any state or federal regulatory or judicial proceedings (1) where the interests of Connecticut consumers may be involved or (2) that affect utility services in the state. OCC is a party to each contested case before the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA, formerly the Department of Public Utilities Control). OCC may appeal decisions, orders, or authorizations in state regulatory proceedings, regardless of whether it participated in them.

### NOMINEE QUESTIONS

1. As noted above, OCC advocates for consumers' interest in utility matters. How should OCC balance its interest in keeping rates affordable with other consumer interests, such as maintaining the reliability of electric power, when these goals potentially conflict?

2. The governor's Two-Storm Panel made many recommendations regarding the electric and telecommunications industries, several of which potentially affect ratepayers, e.g., enhancing tree-trimming programs. Have you reviewed the recommendations and how do you believe the legislature should respond to them?
3. Historically, a large part of OCC's role has been participating in rate cases. The legislature has effectively deregulated the telecommunications and cable TV industries and large parts of the electric industry. How has OCC changed its organization and functions to reflect this change? What new roles do you anticipate OCC playing regarding these industries?
4. Increasingly, federal agencies are making decisions that affect Connecticut ratepayers, e.g., the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's decisions on the rules governing the wholesale electric market. Within existing resources, how can OCC maximize its ability to represent ratepayer interests before these federal agencies? Does OCC need additional resources, which under current law Connecticut ratepayers would ultimately fund?
5. The proposed merger of Northeast Utilities and NSTAR, a large Massachusetts utility, has raised questions about the appropriate role of PURA in reviewing such transactions. Should PURA be required to review and approve such mergers? What role should OCC play in such reviews?
6. The attorney general also participates in certain PURA proceedings, such as major rate cases. Does this lead to duplication of efforts? In these cases, what is the benefit to Connecticut ratepayers and taxpayers in having both agencies involved?
7. PA 11-80 merged the former departments of Environmental Protection and Public Utility Control to form the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP). To what extent can and should OCC participate in the formulation of DEEP's environmental policies that could affect ratepayers, e.g., air quality rules that apply to power plants?

KM:tjo