

## Questions for the Consumer Counsel Nominee

By: Lee Hansen, Associate Analyst

May 5, 2017 | 2017-R-0096

### Consumer Counsel ([CGS § 16-2a](#))

The consumer counsel heads the Office of Consumer Counsel (OCC), which advocates for consumer interests in 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) and may appeal decisions, orders, or authorizations in state regulatory proceedings, regardless of whether it participated in them.

### Questions

1. As noted above, OCC advocates for consumer interests in utility matters. How should OCC balance its interest in keeping utility rates affordable with other consumer interests, such as maintaining the reliability of electric power or encouraging greater use of renewable energy, when these goals potentially conflict?
2. The legislature is currently considering a bill ([SB 106](#)) that, among other things, requires the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), in consultation with OCC and other state officials, to solicit proposals for nuclear power generating facilities to sell power directly to the electric companies under long term contracts. As one of the officials who would help DEEP evaluate the proposals, what factors would you consider when determining whether a proposal was in ratepayers' best interests? When would a rate increase be in a ratepayer's best interest?

3. In recent years, OCC has issued "[Electric Supplier Market Fact Sheets](#)" that compare the electric generation rates paid by the customers of retail electric suppliers against the standard service rates paid by the customers of the electric distribution companies. Over the years, do these sheets show that the suppliers' customers are generally paying more or less than standard service customers? In your opinion, how well informed is the general public about the deregulated electricity market? How effective were the consumer protections enacted by the legislature in 2014 ([PA 14-75](#)) and 2015 ([PA 15-90](#))? What advice would you give to those who are considering contracting with a retail electricity supplier?
4. Historically, a large part of OCC's role has been participating in rate cases. Since the legislature has effectively deregulated the telecommunications and cable TV industries in the state, how has OCC changed its organization and functions to reflect this change? Do you anticipate OCC playing any new roles regarding these industries in the future?
5. 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 or Federal Communications Commission's rulings on net neutrality). To what extent is OCC able to represent ratepayer interests before these federal agencies? Does OCC need additional resources, which under current law Connecticut ratepayers would ultimately fund?
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. Two years ago, the legislature created the Office of State Broadband within OCC and directed it to facilitate the availability of broadband access to every state citizen and to increase access to ultra-high-speed gigabit capable broadband networks. How involved are you with the broadband office's operations? What progress has the office made toward its goal? Since the office's costs are ultimately borne by utility ratepayers, what benefits have they received from the broadband office's work?
8. The legislature just passed a bill ([HB 6008](#)) that creates an independent consumer advocate, appointed by the consumer counsel, to advocate for and represent the interests of Metropolitan District Commission customers. What qualities and characteristics will you look for in a successful consumer advocate candidate? Do you think it would benefit other public utility ratepayers if the legislature expanded OCC's jurisdiction to include municipal and regional utility companies?

9. How actively does OCC participate in water company rate cases? As a member of the Water Planning Council Steering Committee, do you see any water-related issues that might benefit from greater OCC involvement?
  
10. Having completed your first term as Consumer Counsel, what lessons have you learned that you will bring into your second term? When your term ends in five years, what do you hope to have accomplished?

LH:cmg