

REPORT ON CUSTOMER SERVICE

**Submitted to the Governor's Office of Budget and Policy
and the Legislative Budget Board**

by

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Background

As required under Chapter 2114 of the Texas Government Code, the Office of Public Utility Counsel (OPUC) created an inventory of external customers that directly contacted the agency and gathered information from those customers using a survey designed to measure customer satisfaction with the services provided by the agency.

Identification of Customers Served

Created by the Texas Legislature in 1983, OPUC represents residential and small commercial consumers, as a class, in the electric, water, wastewater, and telecommunications utility industries in Texas. OPUC is the only entity in the state that represents residential and small commercial consumer interests in water utility rate-related matters. OPUC primarily represents these consumers in utility matters before the Public Utility Commission of Texas (PUCT), Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT), and state courts. OPUC's Chief Executive & Public Counsel oversees the operation of the agency, including the agency's budget and staffing, and leads the agency's representation of consumers by selecting the cases in which to intervene and selecting the rulemaking and policy projects in which to participate at the PUCT pursuant to the agency's statutory authority.¹ In addition, OPUC assists consumers with utility-related complaints and inquiries, which includes helping consumers reach informal resolution with their utility and referring consumers to the PUCT or other applicable regulatory authority or entity as necessary.

The General Appropriations Act (GAA) for fiscal years 2020 and 2021 contains two strategies for OPUC. The first strategy is "Participation in Major Utility Cases," which reflects the agency's mission of representing residential and small commercial consumers, as a class, in major electric and water utility rate cases. In these major utility rate cases, OPUC staff represents consumers throughout the rate review process, which includes using internal staff attorneys and outside expert consultants to extensively review the utility's rate application, engage in discovery, file expert witness testimony, engage in settlement discussions, participate in hearings, file post-hearing briefs and other key legal filings, and monitor and participate, as necessary, in PUCT deliberation on rate cases at open meetings. The second strategy is "Participation in Major Utility Projects Affecting Consumers," which reflects the agency's responsibility to represent consumers in PUCT rulemaking and policy projects in which the PUCT is addressing policy issues that impact consumers. In these projects, OPUC represents consumers throughout the policymaking and rulemaking process by using internal staff to extensively review the PUCT's rule proposals, filing comments, participating in workshops and hearings, engaging in stakeholder meetings, and monitoring and participating, as necessary, in PUCT deliberation on policy matters at open meetings.

¹ Public Utility Regulatory Act (PURA) §13.003.

Survey Methods and Response Rates

OPUC surveys consumers that directly contact the agency for assistance with utility-related matters. OPUC receives telephone calls, emails, and U.S. mail from consumers with utility-related complaints or inquiries involving a range of issues, which include:

- Billing issues
- Bill payment assistance
- Disconnection of service
- Establishing service
- Specific information about ongoing cases, policy projects, and rulemaking projects

Among these main issues, OPUC primarily receives complaints and inquires relating to billing and service issues. Over the past two fiscal years, the agency did not receive any consumer inquiries regarding PUCT policy projects or rulemaking projects. The agency, however, received consumer inquiries regarding 10 PUCT contested cases.

Following an informal resolution of a consumer complaint or inquiry, OPUC sends the consumer an email with a link to a Customer Service Survey (CSS) that is accessible online. If the consumer does not have email capability, the CSS is sent via U.S. Postal Service. If the consumer does not provide an email or mailing address, the agency is unable to send the CSS to the consumer.

During the last two fiscal years, OPUC received a total of 593 consumer inquiries and was able to send 300 surveys to consumers who provided the agency with an email or mailing address. The number of consumers who responded to OPUC's CSS was 27 out of the 300 surveys or nine percent (9%). This survey response rate is an improvement from the seven percent (7%) survey response rate from the prior fiscal years of 2018 and 2019. Of the survey responses, 22 were submitted online and 5 were returned by U.S. Postal Service.²

Customer Service Quality Standard	Level of Satisfaction
Telephone call, email or mailed letter was routed to proper staff	100%
Telephone call, email or mailed letter was answered timely	92%
Agency website was well-organized and easy to use	88%
Staff interacted in a courteous and professional manner	88%
Staff was knowledgeable and demonstrated a willingness to help	96%
The agency makes it easy to ask questions or to make a complaint	88%

² OPUC provided a self-addressed return envelope with each CSS mailed to a consumer but did not provide return postage.

Analysis and Findings

The majority of the consumers that responded to the survey were satisfied with the assistance provided by agency staff, with ninety-six percent (96%) stating that agency staff was knowledgeable and demonstrated a willingness to help, eighty-eight percent (88%) believing that agency staff interacted with them in a personal and professional manner, and eighty-eight percent (88%) stating that they were satisfied with their overall experience. All consumers who responded to the survey indicated that they believed their inquiry was routed to the proper agency staff and ninety-two percent (92%) felt that they received a timely response from agency staff.

Performance Measures

During the past two fiscal years, OPUC staff met the agency standards for timely response and returning customer inquiries within twenty-four (24) hours of receipt. OPUC expects its performance for the next fiscal years to maintain this high standard.

Outcome Measures

Percentage of Surveyed Consumer Respondents Expressing Overall Satisfaction with Services	88%
Percentage of Surveyed Consumer Respondents Identifying Ways to Improve Service Delivery	0%

Output Measures

Total Consumers Surveyed	300
Total Consumers Served	593

Efficiency Measures

Cost per Consumer Surveyed	\$2.72
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Explanatory Measures

Total Consumers Identified	593
Total Consumer Groups Inventoried	2