

REPORT ON CUSTOMER SERVICE

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

by

OFFICE OF PUBLIC UTILITY COUNSEL



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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 and gathered information from those customers using a survey designed to measure customer satisfaction with services provided.

Identification of Customer Groups

OPUC represents residential and small commercial ratepayers, as a class, in electric, telephone and water and waste water utility rate hearings and rulemakings that come before the Public Utility Commission (PUC), the State Office of Administrative Hearings (SOAH), and state and federal courts. The total number of customers served is estimated to be 11.4 million¹. The total number of ratepayers affected in any given proceeding can vary from several hundred to more than 1 million. Therefore, the agency determined it is cost prohibitive to seek out and contact each affected ratepayer. OPUC instead surveyed those customers that directly contacted or interacted with OPUC. OPUC receives phone calls, emails, and U.S. mail from utility customers with complaints or inquiries involving a range of issues including but not limited to the following:

- Billing issues
- Bill payment assistance
- Disconnection of service
- Establishing service
- Specific information about ongoing cases or proceedings

The agency uses its relationships with industry businesses and organizations to address and hopefully resolve each customer's issue. After a complaint or inquiry has been closed out, OPUC mails its Customer Service Survey (CSS) to the customer if the customer provided a mailing address.

For statistical purposes, the agency separated customers into the following three subgroups:

- Electric utility customers
- Telephone utility customers
- Water utility customers

¹ This estimate is based on the latest data from the United States Census Bureau, where the number of households in Texas is reported at 9,013,582 (<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48000.html>), and from the U.S. Small Business Administration where the number of Texas small businesses is reported at 2.4 million (<https://www.sba.gov/sites/default/files/advocacy/Texas.pdf>).

Response Rates

The number of respondents to OPUC's CSS was 29 out of 356 or eight percent (8%). All responses are returned by U.S. Postal Service. OPUC provides a self-addressed envelope with each CSS but does not provide for return postage. The agency will continue to evaluate its customer satisfaction levels and response rates, and improve upon its survey process where applicable.

Electric customers represented fifty-two percent (52%) of respondents, followed by telephone customers with twenty-one percent (21%), and water customers with twenty-seven percent (27%).

Key Findings

The majority of respondents were satisfied with agency staff with ninety-seven percent (97%) believing staff interacted in a personal and professional manner, and eighty-six (86%) were satisfied overall with their experience.

Forty-four percent (44%) of survey respondents were customers with complaints regarding billing or customer service issues with their utility. Six percent (6%) involved issues establishing utility service, ten percent (10%) were requests for bill payment assistance, ten percent (10%) involved disconnection of utility service, three percent (3%) involved questions regarding specific cases, and twenty-seven (27%) involved inquiries and other issues outside the agency's authority.

Challenges Identified

Survey results do not always reflect respondent experiences with OPUC. Customers often do not differentiate among experiences with their Retail Electric Provider, Transmission and Distribution Utility, the Public Utility Commission and OPUC.

Further, in some cases OPUC is ultimately unable to assist customers after exhausting all administrative remedies. In those cases, customers may not adequately understand the agency's role and jurisdiction within utility regulation.

Finally, some respondents simply do not answer all survey questions, while others select multiple answers for some questions.

Outcome Measures

Measure	FY 2014 – FY 2015
Electric utility customers	52%
Telephone customers	21%
Water utility customers	27%
Billing/customer service issues	44%
Issues with establishing utility service	6%
Bill payment assistance	10%
Issues with disconnection of utility service	10%
Questions about specific cases.	3%
Other issues or inquiries.	27%
Telephone call, email or letter was routed to proper staff.	100%
Telephone call, email or letter was answered timely.	100%
Staff interacted in a personal and professional manner.	97%
Staff was knowledgeable and demonstrated a willingness to help.	93%
The agency makes it easy to ask questions or to make a complaint.	97%
Customer was satisfied overall with their experience.	86%

Estimated Performance for 2016

Telephone call, email or letter was routed to proper staff.	100%
Telephone call, email or letter was answered timely.	100%
Staff interacted in a personal and professional manner.	100%
Staff was knowledgeable and demonstrated a willingness to help.	95%
The agency makes it easy to ask questions or to make a complaint.	95%
Customer was satisfied overall with their experience.	90%

Output Measures

Number of customers surveyed 356

Efficiency Measures

Approximate cost per customer surveyed \$0.48

Explanatory Measures

Number of customers identified 11.4 million
Number of customer groups inventoried 1