

MONTANA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION



*Consumer Assistance Program
2016 Annual Review*

The Consumer Assistance Program is within the Legal Division of the Montana Public Service Commission (Commission). The program staff mediates and resolves disputes between regulated companies and their customers. The program consists of one program manager, one consumer representative, and one half-time compliance specialist.

In 2016, the toll-free consumer assistance line received 3,665 incoming calls. Consumers also contacted the Commission through the following means:

- 104 direct e-mails to a staff person or Commissioner;
- 60 letters received via the US Postal Service;
- 14 walk-ins; and
- An indeterminate number of calls received by either the Commission's non-toll-free consumer assistance number or the Commission's main phone number. The Commission has no way to monitor how many of these calls are received.

Of the 3,843 documented contacts made to the Commission through the end of December, 967 entries were submitted into our tracking database. 439 concerned energy; 337 concerned telecommunications; 140 were miscellaneous contacts; 47 dealt with transportation matters (2016 is the first year transportation matters have been entered into the tracking database); and four pertained to water/sewer.

If staff contacts a regulated company to attempt resolution for a consumer, the matter is entered into our tracking database and is considered a complaint for reporting purposes. When an inquiry comes in that doesn't require company contact but does require research and response, it is entered into the database as a "miscellaneous" contact for tracking purposes. Inquiries that can be answered without company contact or research are not entered into the database.

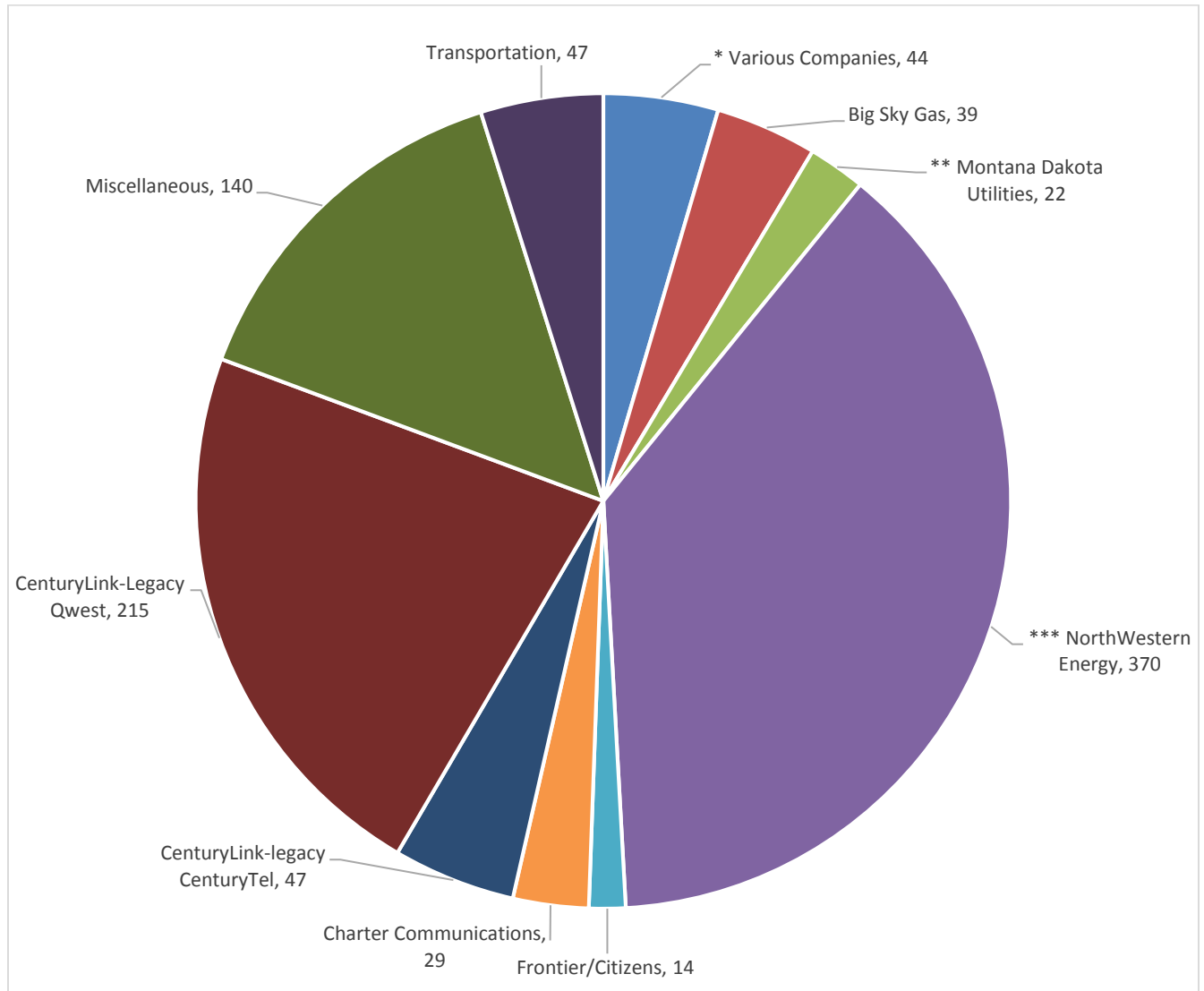
In addition to providing assistance to consumers, Consumer Assistance Program staff also participate in the following tasks:

- Participates on work teams with other agency staff members to review, analyze and make recommendations on proceedings before the Commission;
- Develops rulemaking proposals regarding utility practices and utility consumer protection issues;
- Tracks and reports natural gas/electric current and historic rates;
- Monitors National Regulatory Research Institute (NRRI) teleseminars;
- Observes National Exchange Carrier Association (NECA) webcasts;
- Participates in State National Action Plan (SNAP) conference calls and meetings;
- Attends National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC) conference calls and meetings;
- Presents PSC information to interested groups;
- Contributes to boards and committees impacting utility consumers; and
- Follows changes in utility consumer law at both the state and federal level.

The following reports provide further analysis of calls and requests for assistance received by the Consumer Assistance Program staff during 2016.

---Tina Shorten, Manager
Consumer Assistance Program

Consumer Assistance by Utility January – December 2016 Total - 967

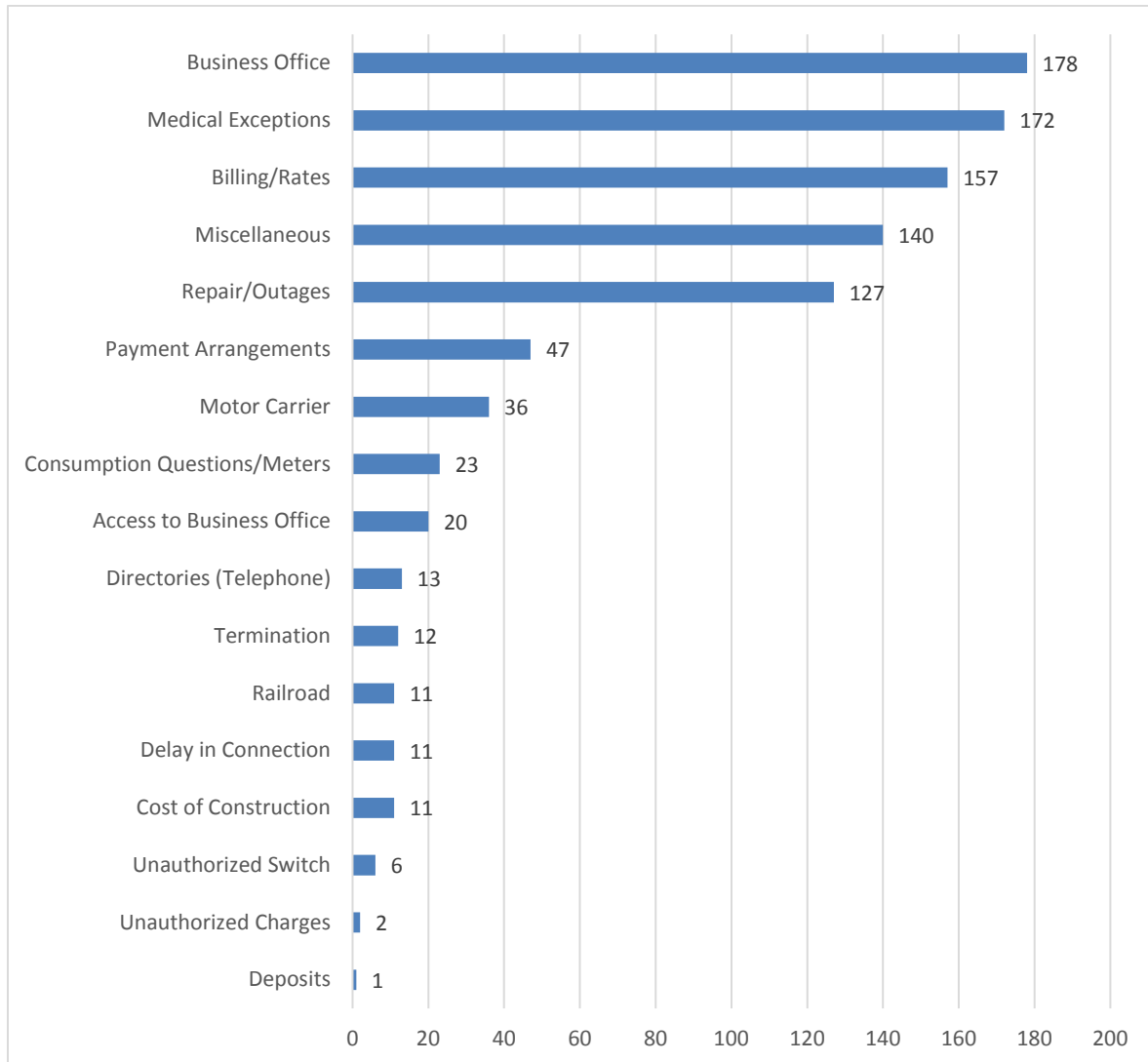


* Requests for consumer assistance involving the following companies totaled 10 or less each: Affinity Network Incorporated, American Telecommunications Systems, AquaFlo LLC, AT&T, Birch Communications, Central Montana Communications, CenturyLink Long Distance, Cut Bank Gas, Encartele, Encompass, Energy West, H&I Development, Long Distance America, Long Distance Services, MCI, MCI MetroAccess, Montana Opticom, MontanaSky.net, Mountain Water Company, Nationwide Long Distance Service, Project Telephone Company, Securus Technologies, STi Prepaid LLC, TCT West Inc., Telmate LLC, US Telecom Long Distance Inc., and Wettington Acres Water Service.

** Of the 22 contacts regarding Montana Dakota Utilities, 2 were notifications from MDU of intent to proceed with disconnect on an account noted with a medical exception.

*** Of the 370 contacts regarding NorthWestern Energy, 170 were notifications from NWE of intent to proceed with disconnect on an account noted with a medical exception.

Consumer Assistance by Category January – December 2016 Total - 967



Explanation of top five categories:

Business Office: Company personnel, misinformation, anything that doesn't fit elsewhere

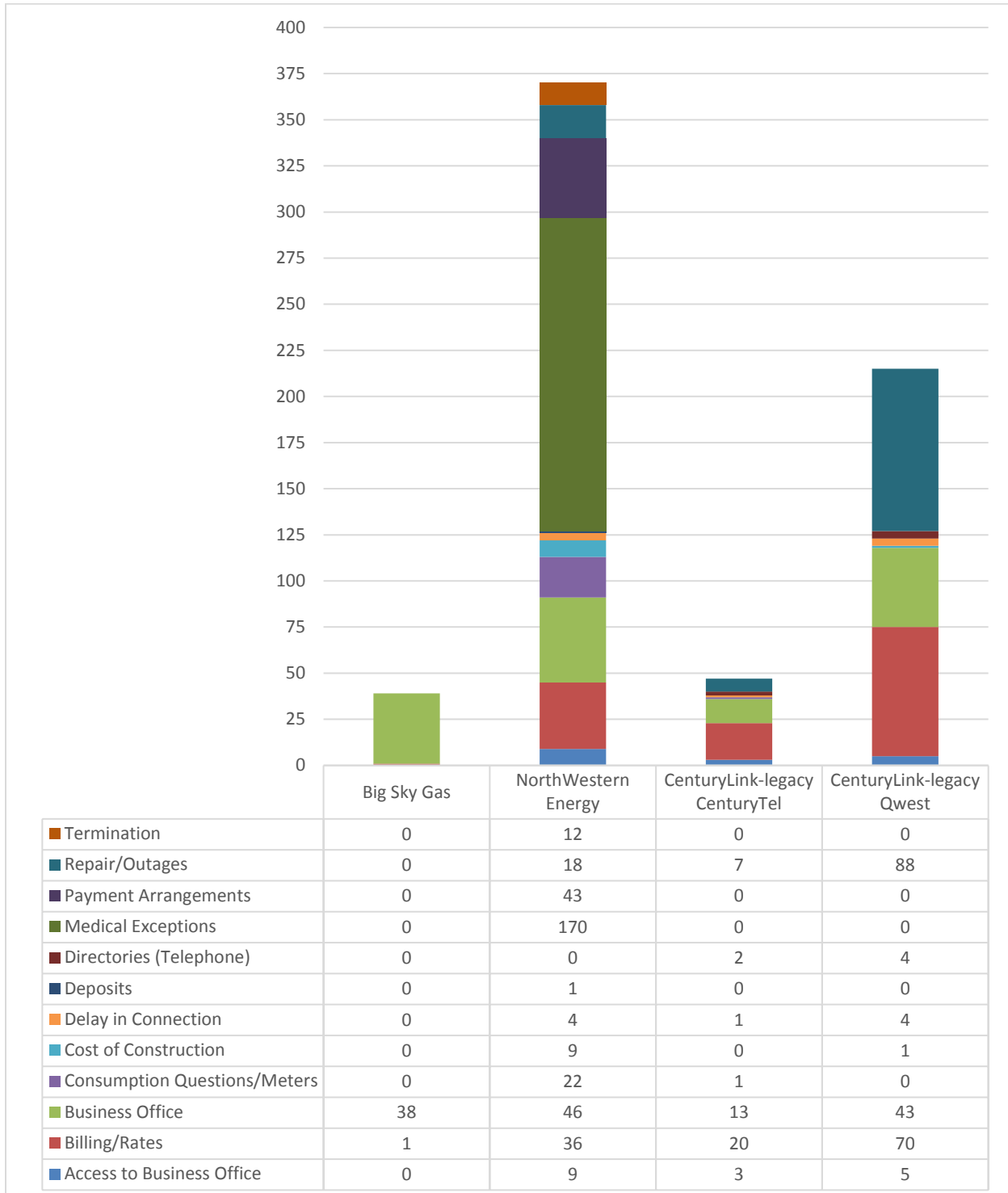
Medical Exceptions: Notification from a utility company of intent to proceed with disconnect on an account noted with a medical exception

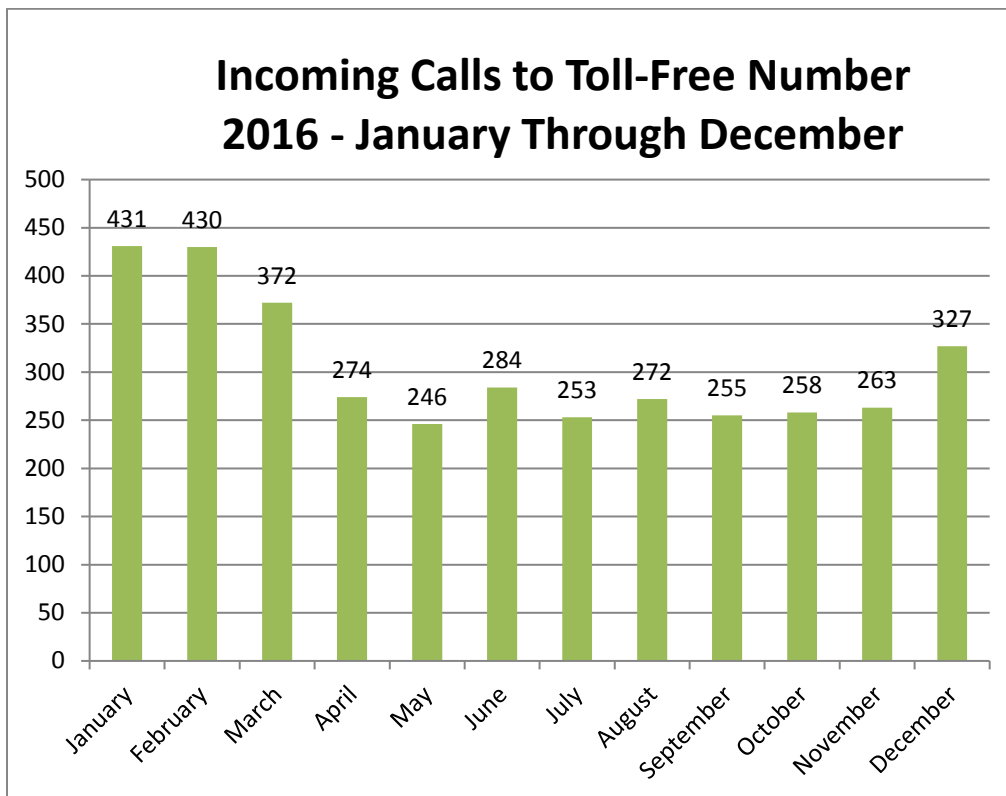
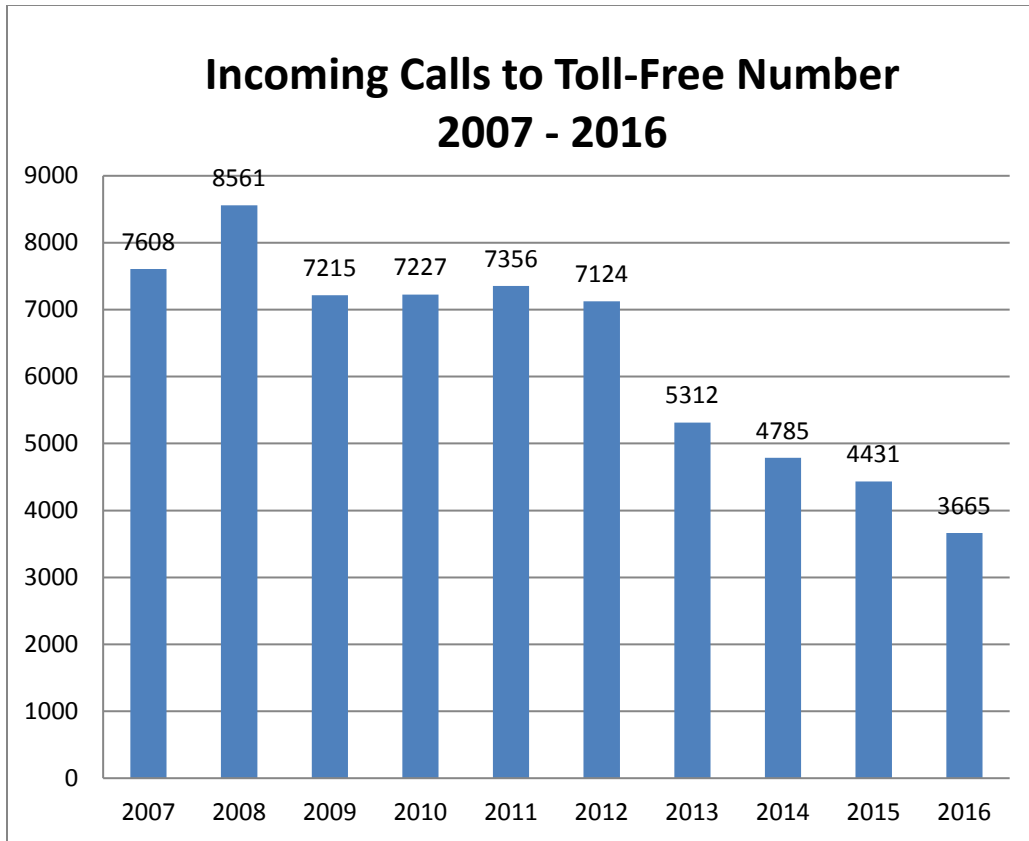
Billing/Rates: Incorrect billing, billing questions, collect call charges, calling plans, inmate calls

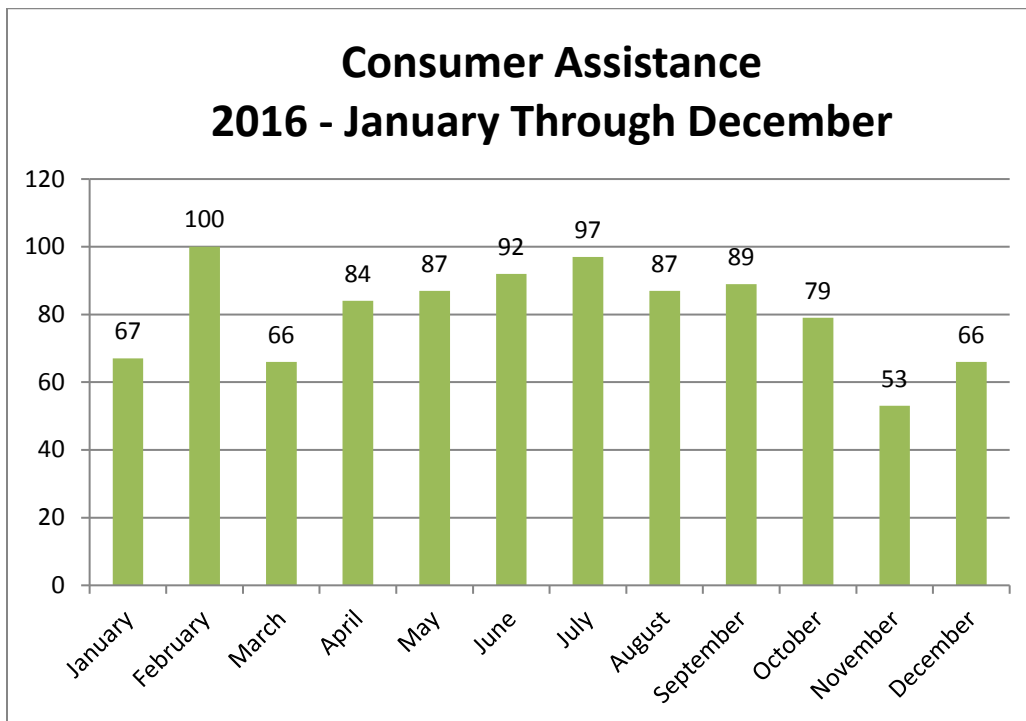
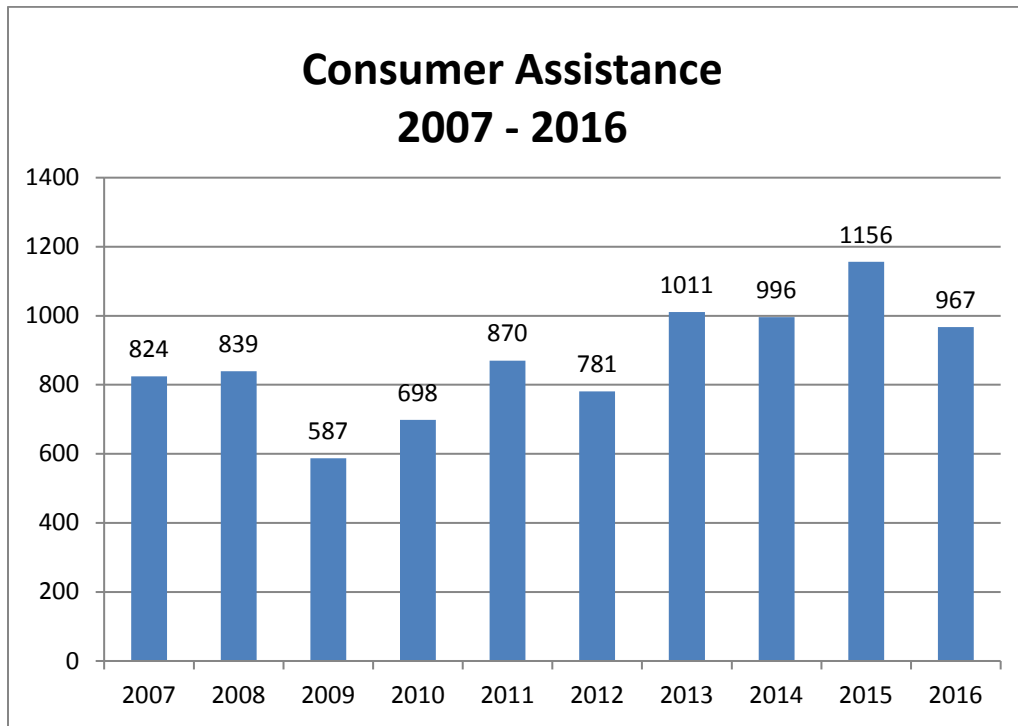
Miscellaneous: Requests for information that require research and response but do not require utility contact; and referrals on non-regulated products or to a non-regulated company

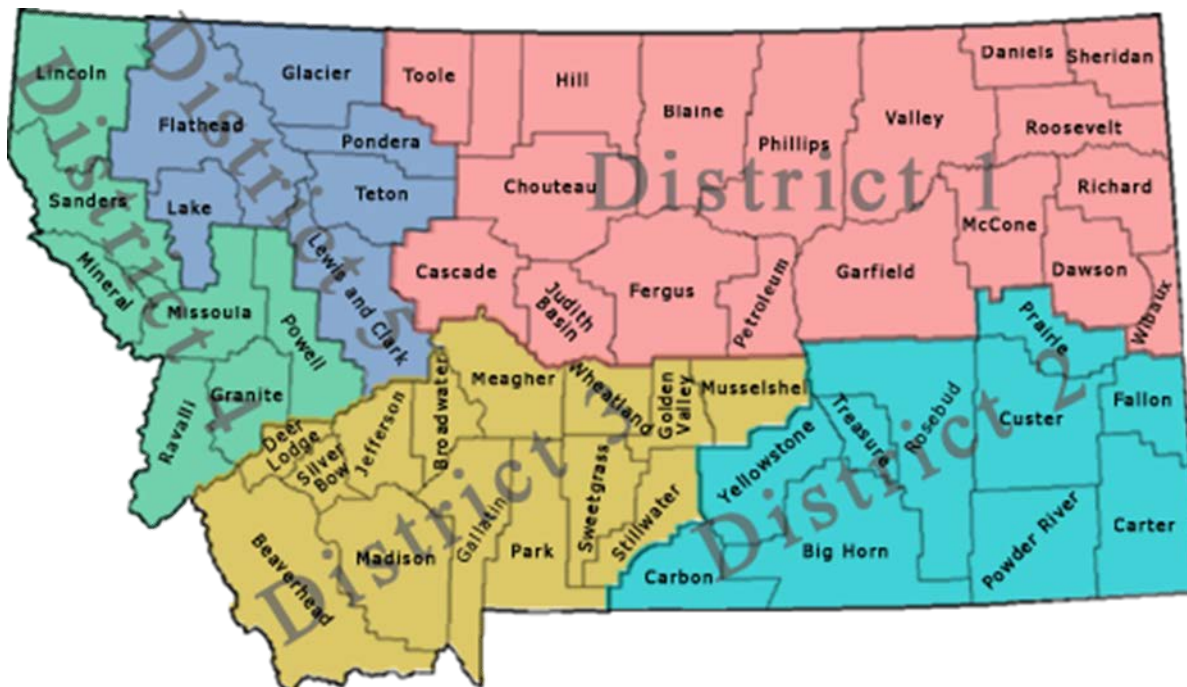
Repair/Outages: Utility service either completely out or needing repair

Breakdown by Category for Companies With Highest Volume of Consumer Assistance Requests January – December 2016









Commissioner District 1 - Travis Kavulla (2011-2018)
 Commissioner District 2 - Kirk Bushman (2013-2016)
 Commissioner-Elect District 2 – Tony O’Donnell (2017-2020)
 Commissioner District 3 - Roger Koopman (2013-2020)
 Commissioner District 4 - Bob Lake (2013-2020)
 Commissioner District 5 – Brad Johnson (2015-2018)

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