

MONTANA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION



*Consumer Assistance Program
2016 Semi-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.

Through June of 2016, the toll-free consumer assistance line received 2,037 incoming calls. Consumers also contacted the Commission through the following means:

- 61 direct e-mails to a staff person or Commissioner;
- 33 letters received via the US Postal Service;
- 9 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 2,140 documented contacts made to the Commission through the end of June, 495 entries were submitted into our tracking database. 248 concerned energy; 157 concerned telecommunications; 71 were miscellaneous contacts; 17 dealt with transportation matters (2016 is the first year transportation matters have been entered into the tracking database); and two 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.

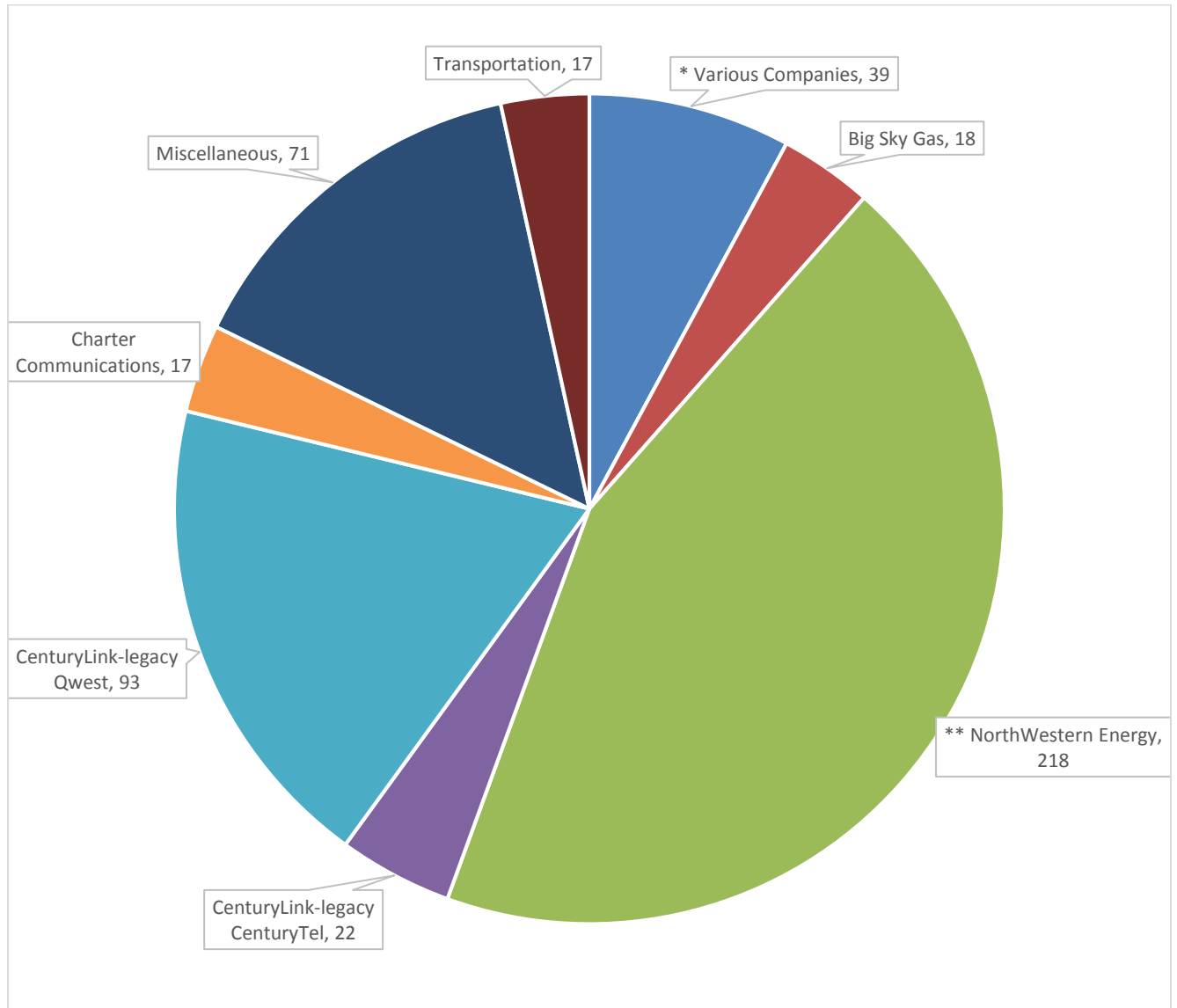
In addition to providing assistance to consumers, Consumer Assistance Program staff also participate in the following tasks:

- Provide input on formal consumer dockets;
- Monitor National Regulatory Research Institute (NRRI) teleseminars;
- Observe National Exchange Carrier Association (NECA) webcasts;
- Participate in State National Action Plan (SNAP) conference calls and meetings;
- Attend National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC) conference calls and meetings;
- Present PSC information to interested groups;
- Contribute to boards and committees impacting utility consumers; and
- Follow 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 through June of 2016.

---Tina Shorten, Manager
Consumer Assistance Program

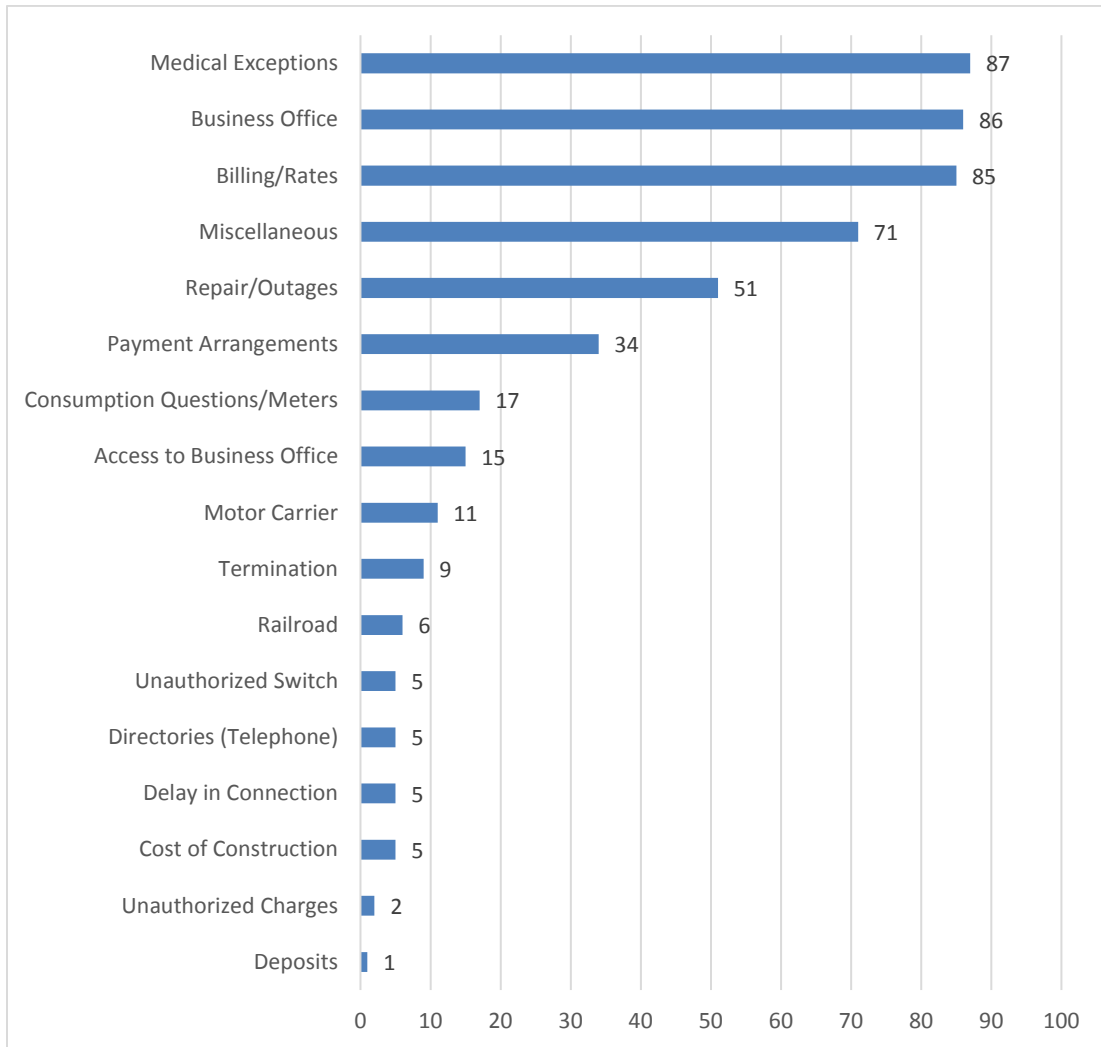
**January – June 2016
Consumer Assistance by Utility
Total - 495**



* Requests for consumer assistance involving these companies totaled 10 or less each: Affinity Network Incorporated, American Telecommunications Systems, AT&T, Birch Communications, Central Montana Communications, Encartele, Energy West, Citizens Telecommunications/Frontier, H&I Development, Long Distance America, MCI, MCI MetroAccess, Montana Dakota Utilities, MontanaSky.net, Nationwide Long Distance Service, Project Telephone Company, STi Prepaid LLC, Telmate LLC, and Wettington Acres Water Service.

** Of the 218 contacts regarding NorthWestern Energy, 87 were notifications from NWE of intent to proceed with disconnect on an account noted with a medical exception.

January – June 2016 Consumer Assistance by Category Total - 495



Explanation of top five categories:

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

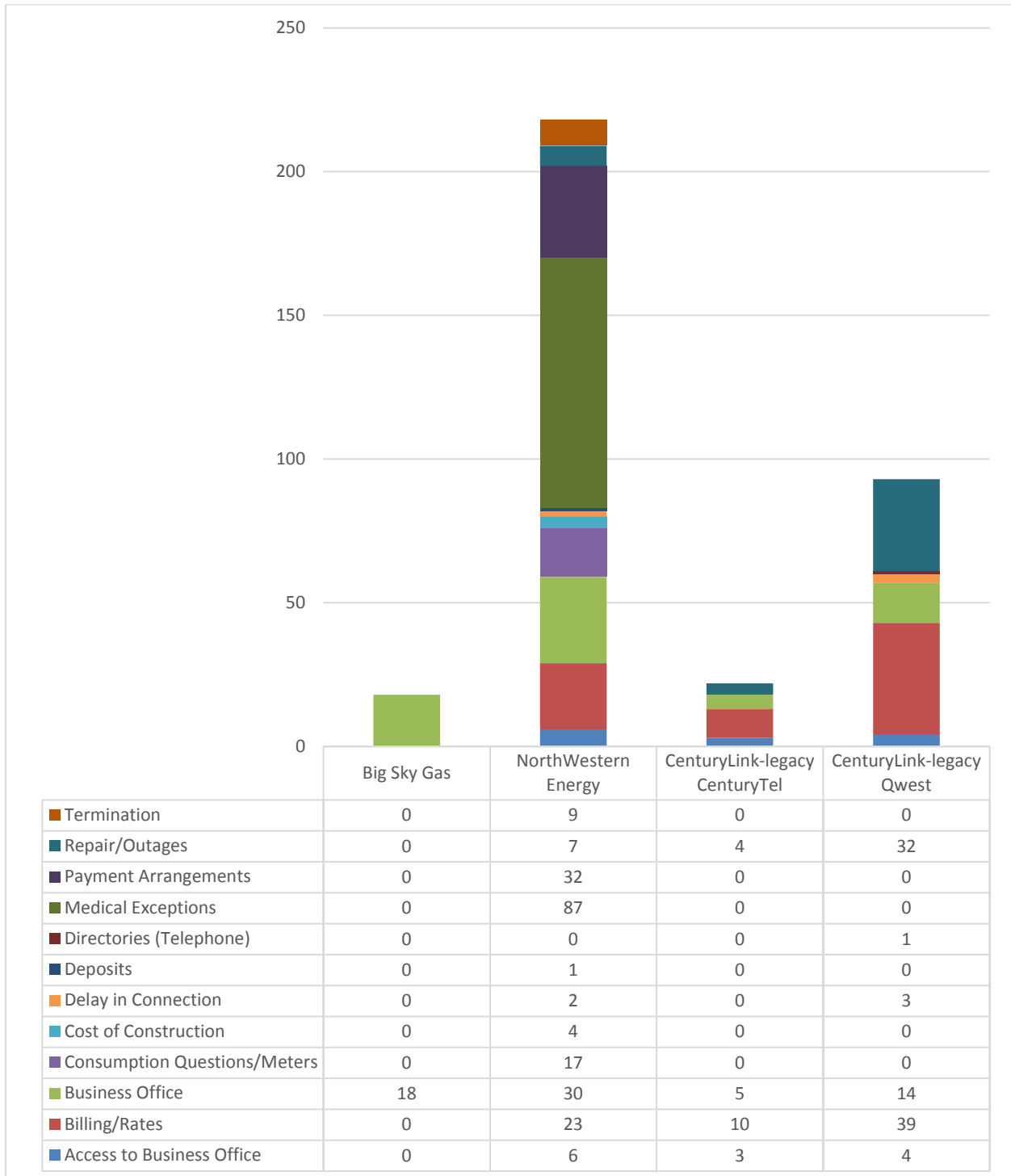
Business Office: Company personnel, misinformation, anything that doesn't fit elsewhere

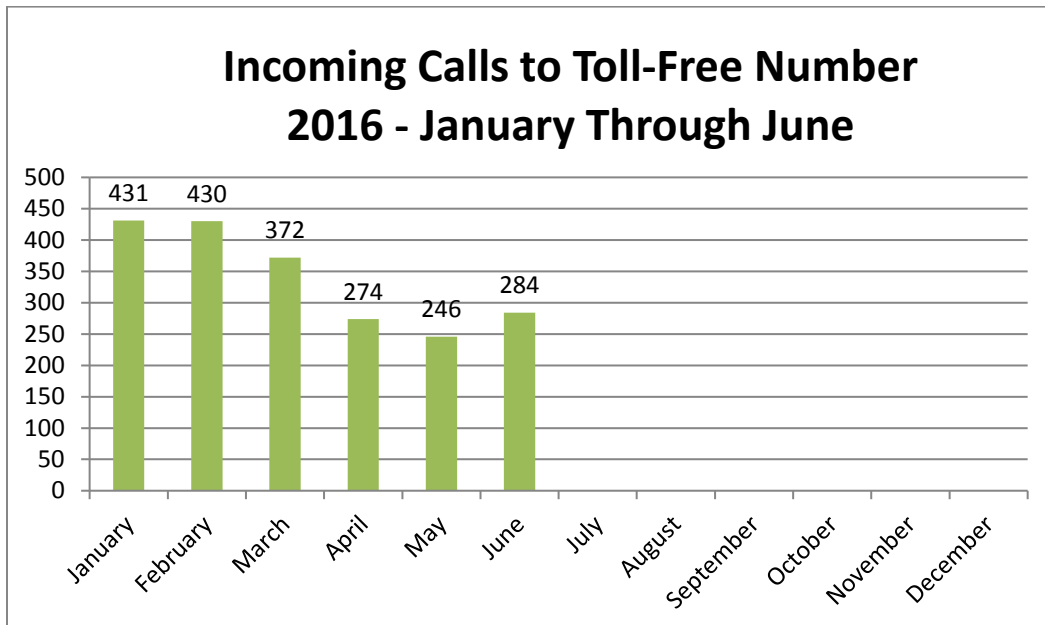
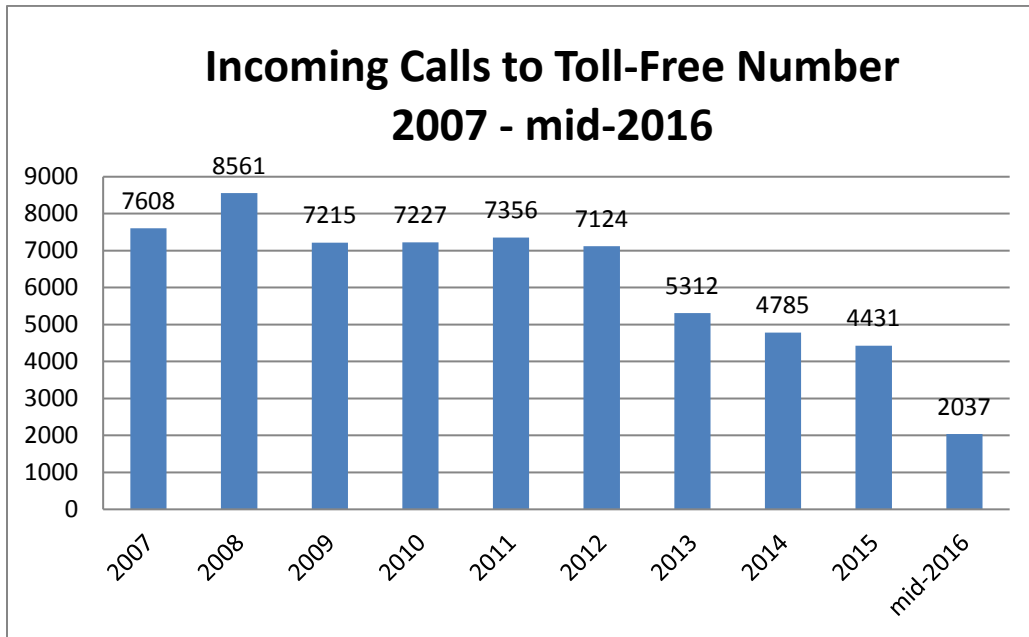
Billing/Rates: Incorrect billing, billing questions, collect call charges, calling plans, inmate calls

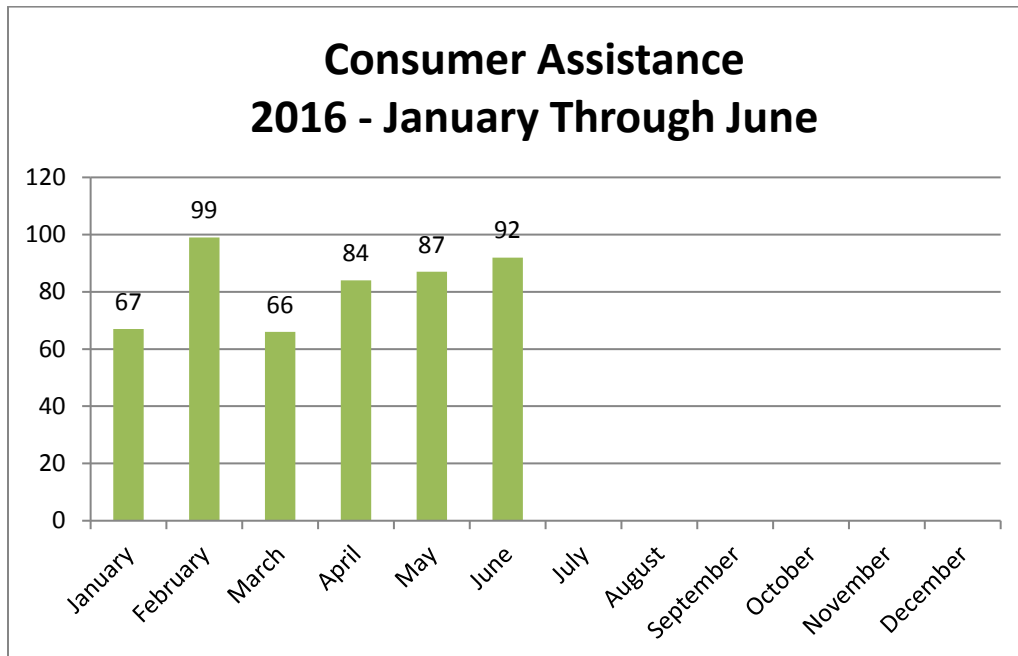
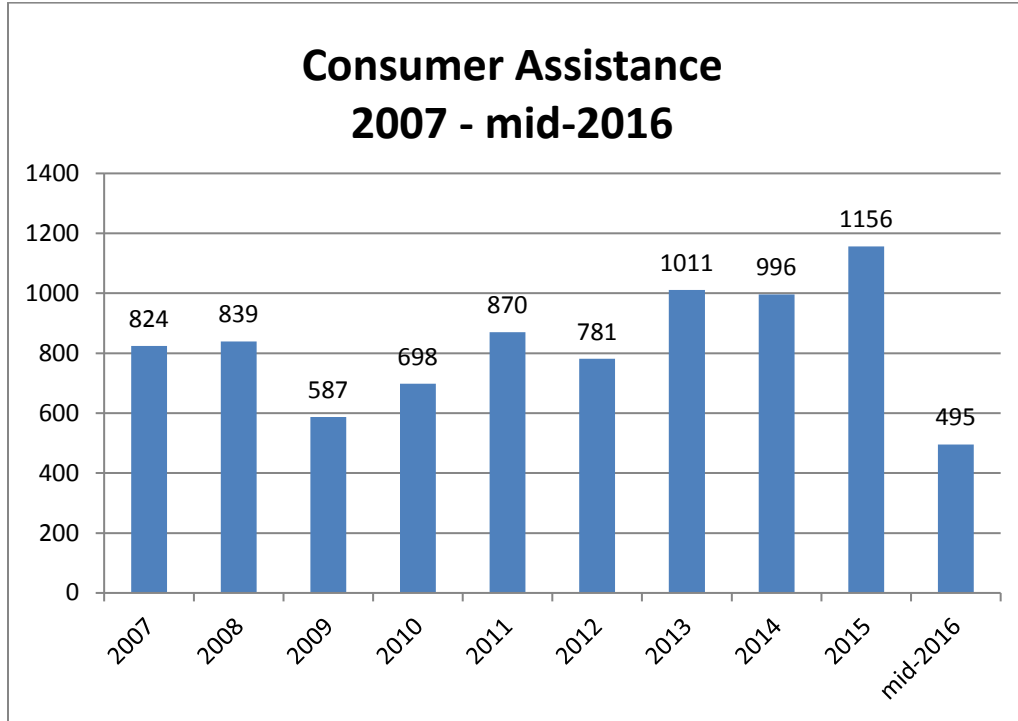
Miscellaneous: Requests for information that require research and response but do not require utility contact; and referrals on non-regulated products or to a non-regulated company

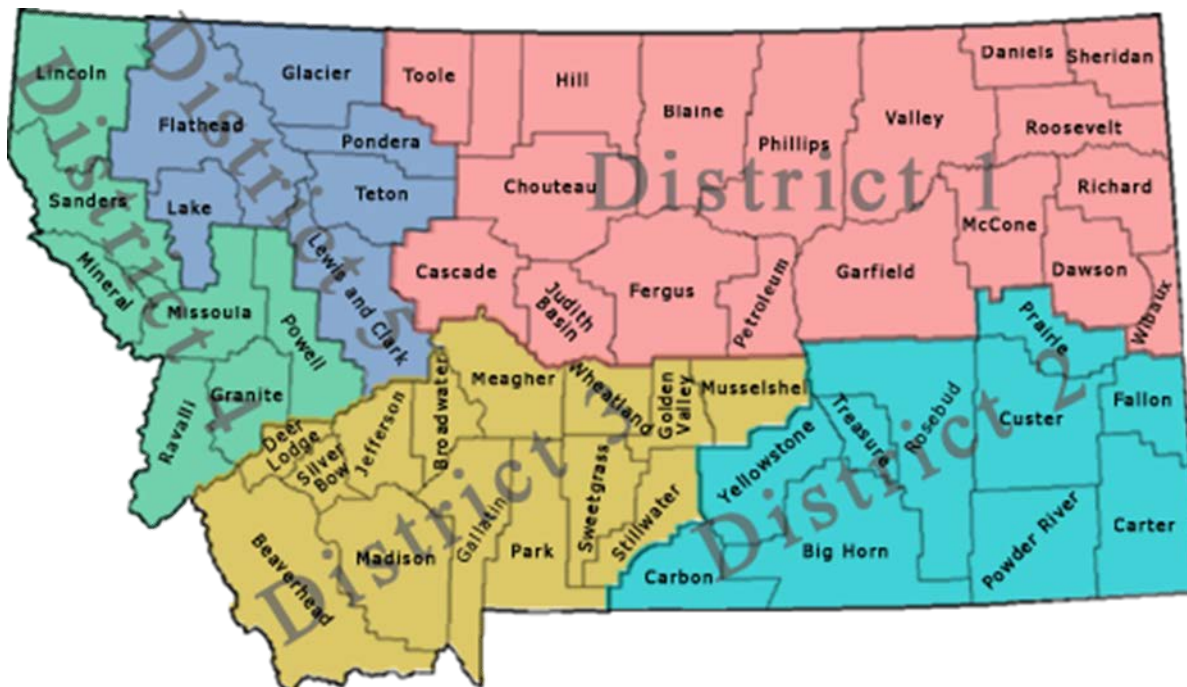
Repair/Outages: Outages or repair issues

Breakdown by Category for Companies With Highest Volume of Consumer Assistance Requests









Commissioner District 1 - Travis Kavulla
 Commissioner District 2 - Kirk Bushman
 Commissioner District 3 - Roger Koopman
 Commissioner District 4 - Bob Lake
 Commissioner District 5 – Brad Johnson

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