

*Consumer Assistance Program
2017 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.

During 2017, the toll-free consumer assistance line received 3,415 incoming calls. Consumers also contacted the Commission through the following means:

- 149 direct e-mails to a staff person or Commissioner;
- 58 letters received via the US Postal Service;
- 10 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 3,632 documented contacts made to the Commission during 2017, 1,027 entries were submitted into our tracking database: 441 concerned energy; 288 concerned telecommunications; 218 were miscellaneous contacts; 62 dealt with transportation matters; and 18 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 request for consumer assistance for reporting purposes. When an inquiry comes in that doesn't require company contact, it is entered into the database as a "miscellaneous" contact for tracking purposes.

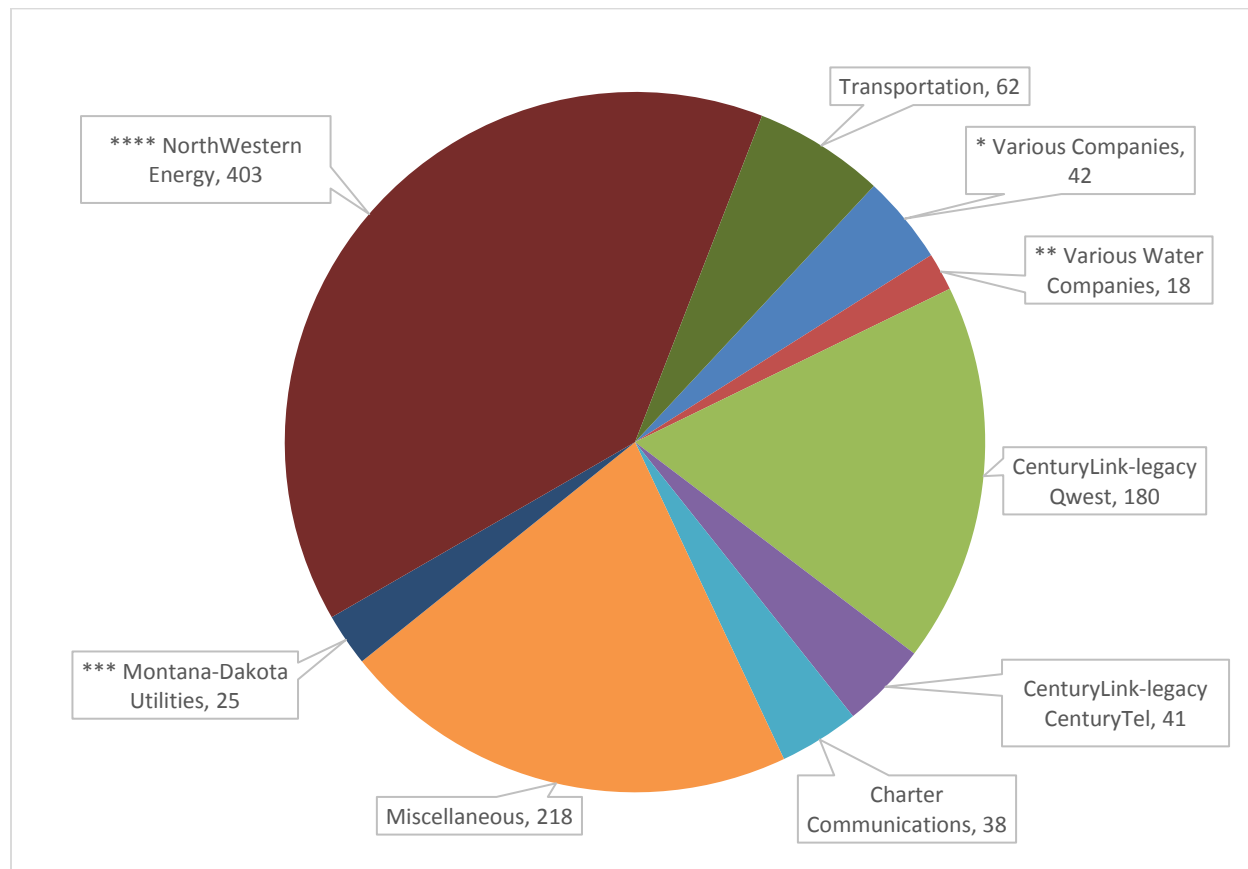
In addition to providing assistance to consumers, Consumer Assistance Program staff also participate in the following tasks:

- 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 2017.

---Tina Shorten, Manager
Consumer Assistance Program

Consumer Assistance by Utility January – December 2017 Total - 1027



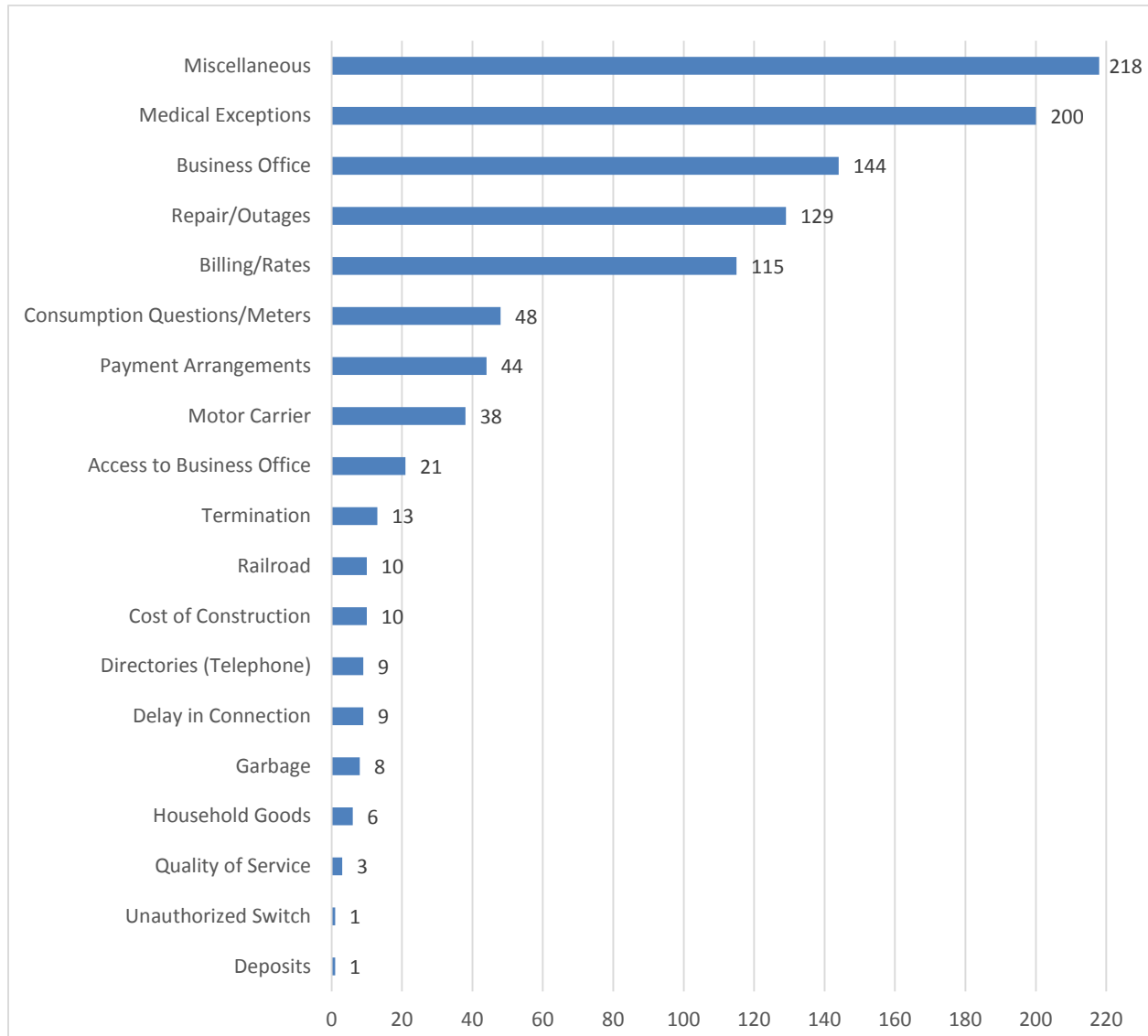
* Requests for consumer assistance involving the following companies totaled 10 or less each: 3 Rivers Communications Long Distance (1), AT&T (1), Big Sky Gas (8), CenturyLink Long Distance (1), Custom Teleconnect (1), Energy West (5), Frontier/Citizens (4), Integra Telecom (4), Long Distance Access (2), MCI (1), Montana Opticom (3), MontanaSky.net (1), Pioneer Telephone (1), Project Telephone (2), RT Communications (1), Securus Technologies (3), Telmate (1), United Telecom (1), and VarTec Telecom (1).

** Requests for consumer assistance involving the following water companies totaled 10 or less each: Alpine Pacific Utilities (1), AquaFlo LLC (1), HLH LLC (1), Homberg Village Water Company (2), Mountain Water Company (2), North Star Water and Sewer (8), Wettington Acres Water Service (2), and Williams Water Works (1).

*** Of the 25 requests for consumer assistance involving Montana-Dakota Utilities, 2 were notifications from MDU of intent to proceed with disconnect on an account noted with a medical exception.

***** Of the 403 requests for consumer assistance involving NorthWestern Energy, 198 were notifications from NWE of intent to proceed with disconnect on an account noted with a medical exception.

Consumer Assistance by Category January – December 2017 Total - 1027



Explanation of top five categories:

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

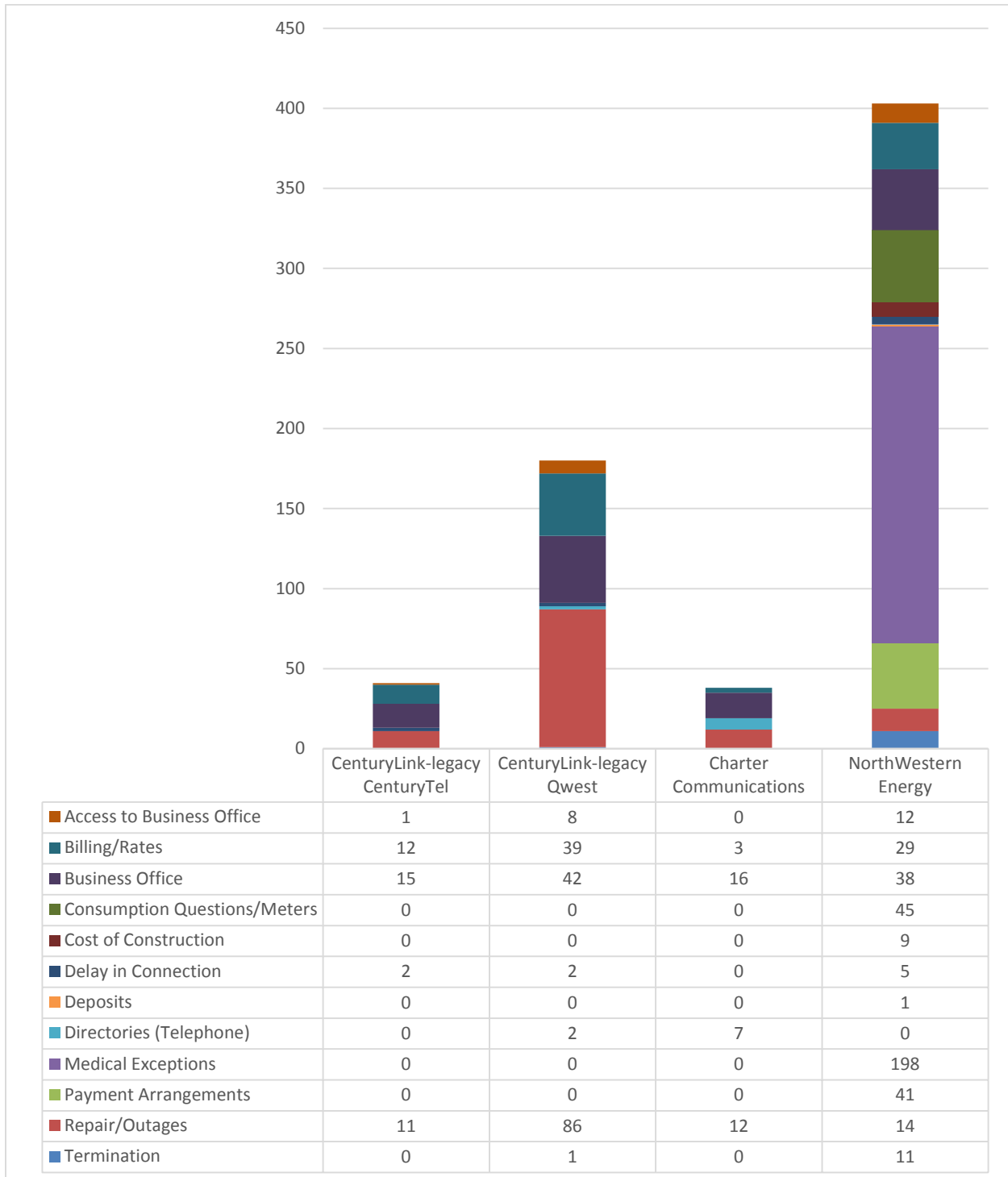
Medical Exceptions: Notification from a utility company of intent to proceed with disconnect on an account noted with a medical exception

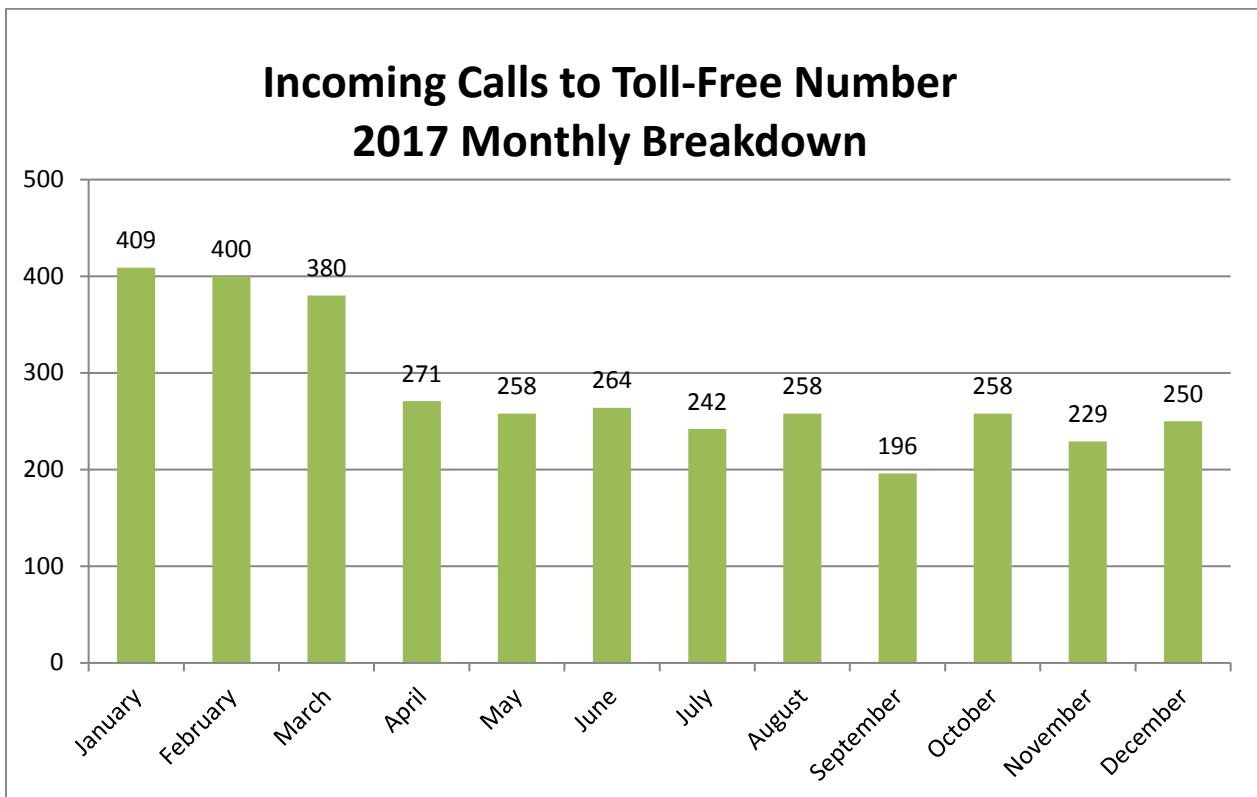
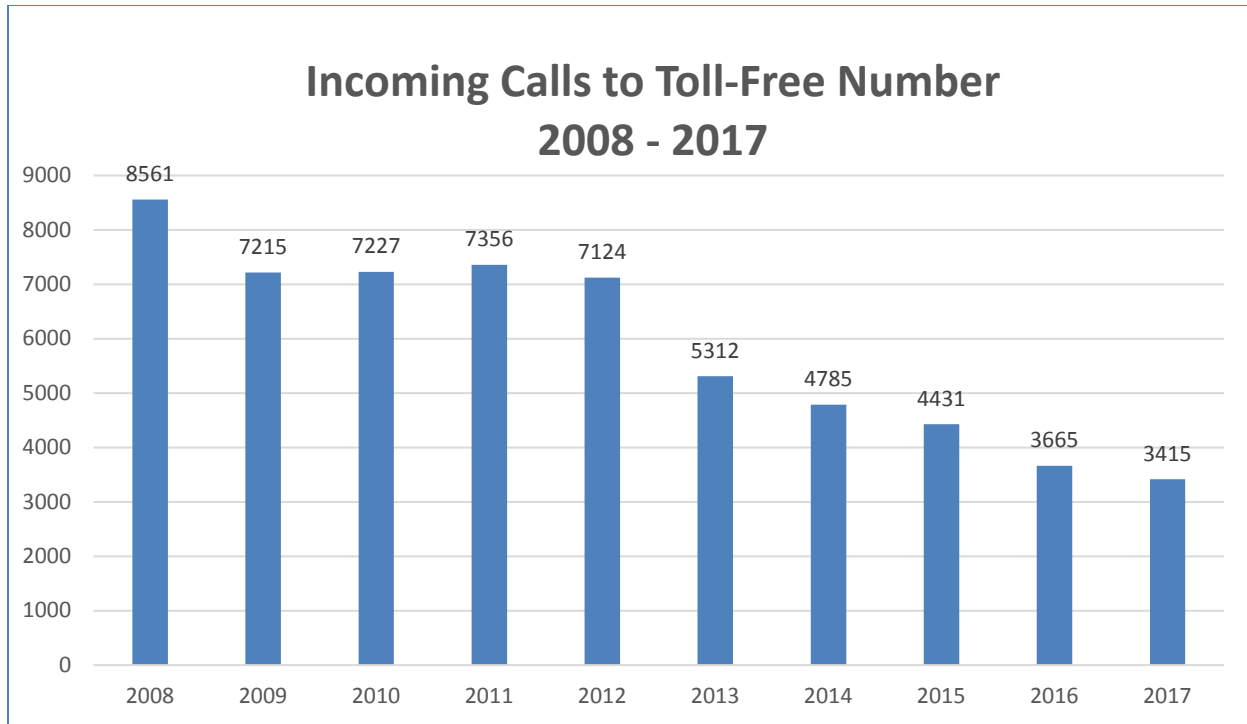
Business Office: Company personnel, misinformation, anything that doesn't fit elsewhere

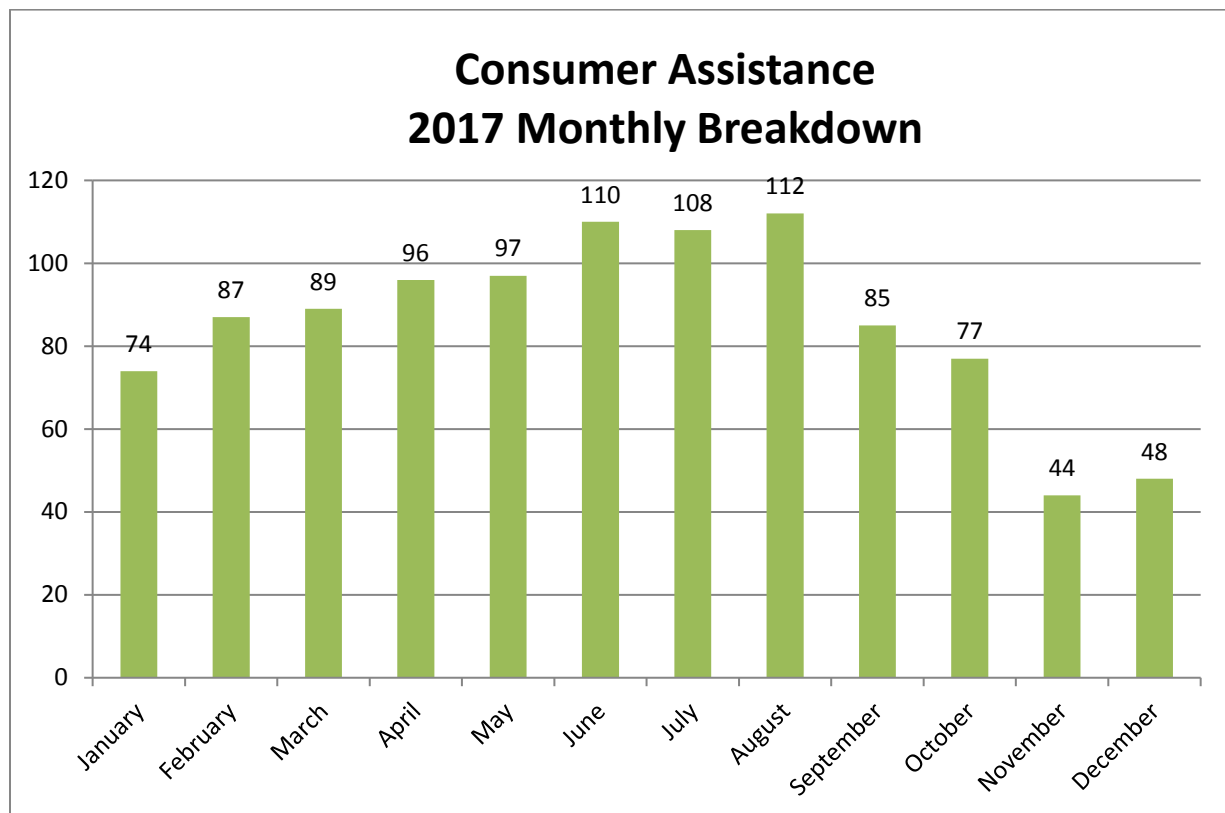
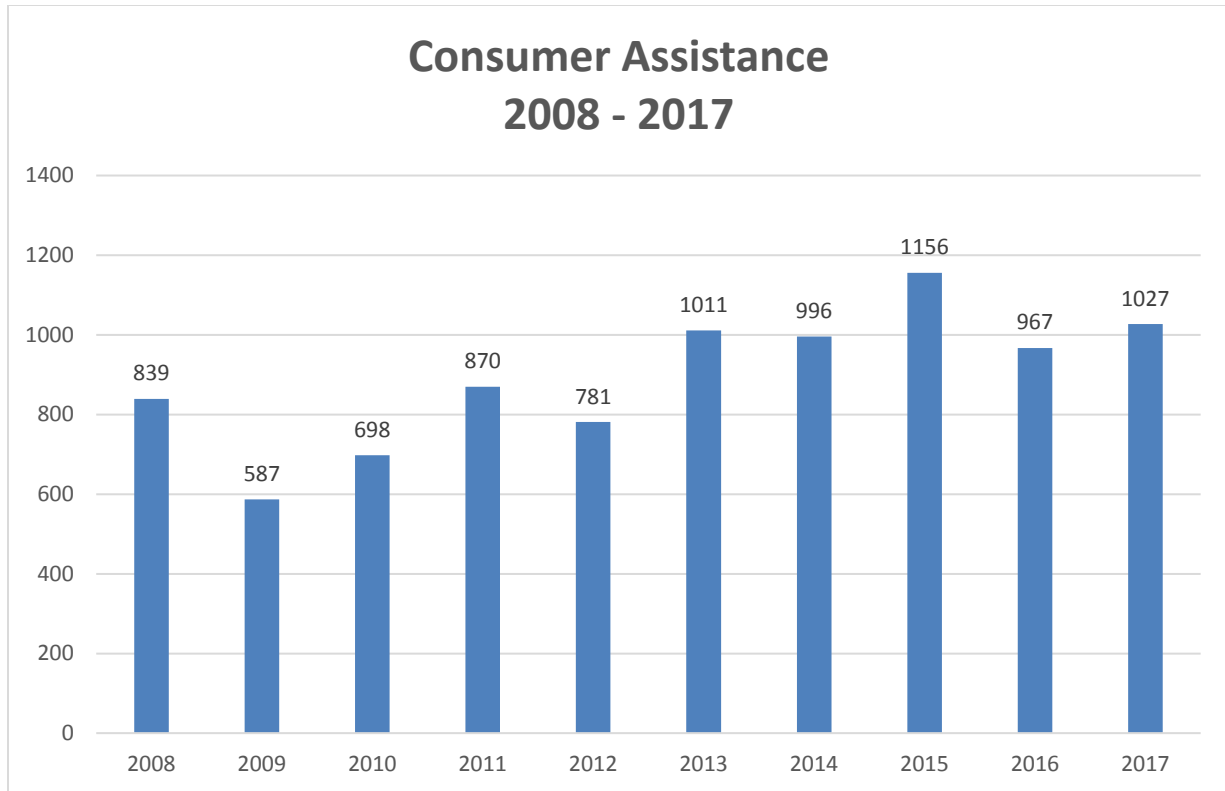
Repair/Outages: Utility service either completely out or needing repair

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

Breakdown by Category for Companies With Highest Volume of Consumer Assistance Requests January – December 2017









Commissioner District 1 - Travis Kavulla (2011-2018)
 Commissioner 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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