

# MONTANA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION



*Consumer Assistance Program  
2017 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 2017, the toll-free consumer assistance line received 1,982 incoming calls. Consumers also contacted the Commission through the following means:

- 72 direct e-mails to a staff person or Commissioner;
- 29 letters received via the US Postal Service;
- 6 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 2,089 documented contacts made to the Commission through the end of June, 553 entries were submitted into our tracking database: 275 concerned energy; 137 concerned telecommunications; 100 were miscellaneous contacts; 36 dealt with transportation matters; and 5 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 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.

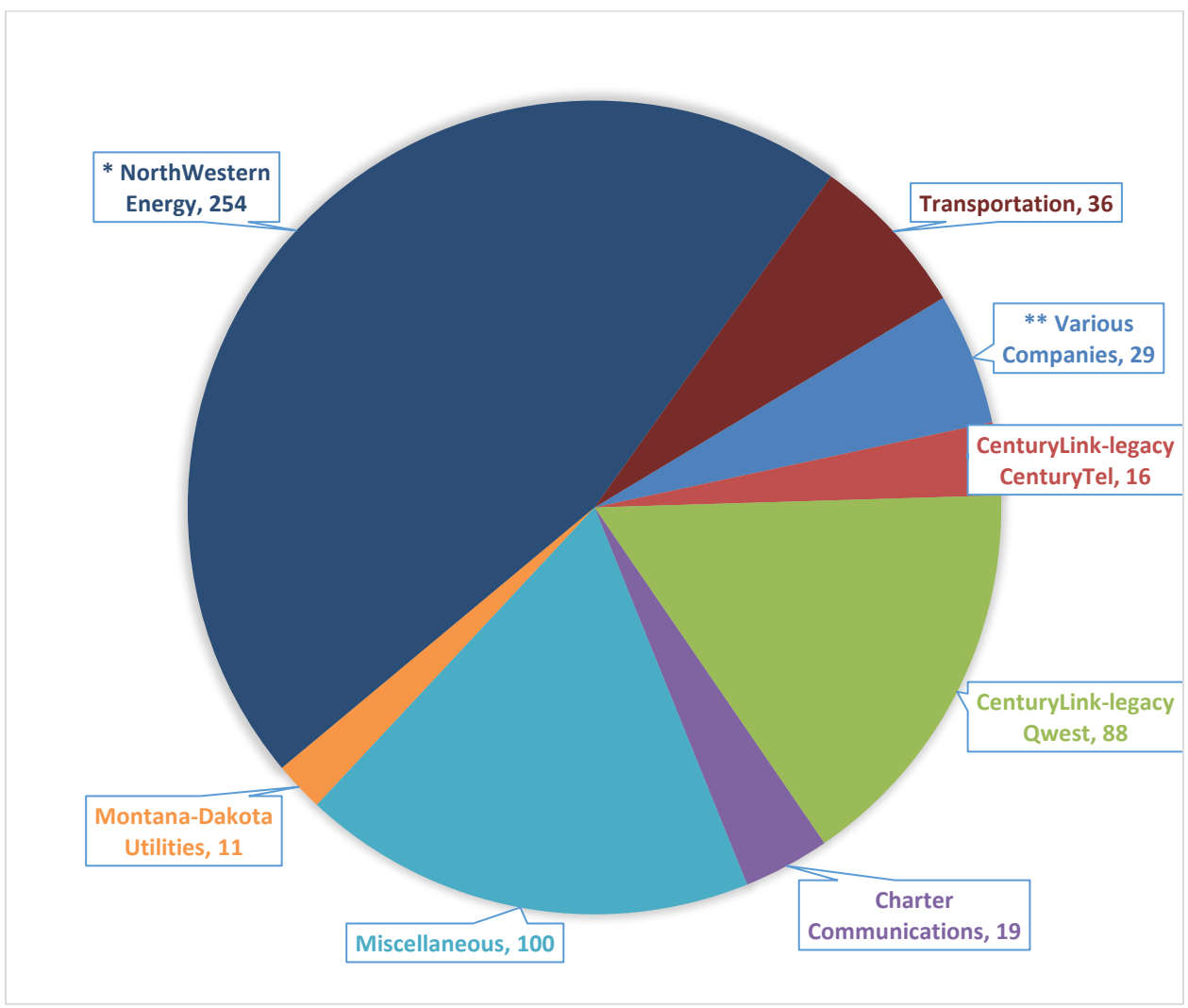
In addition to providing assistance to consumers, Consumer Assistance Program staff also participate in the following tasks:

- 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 through June 2017.

---Tina Shorten, Manager  
Consumer Assistance Program

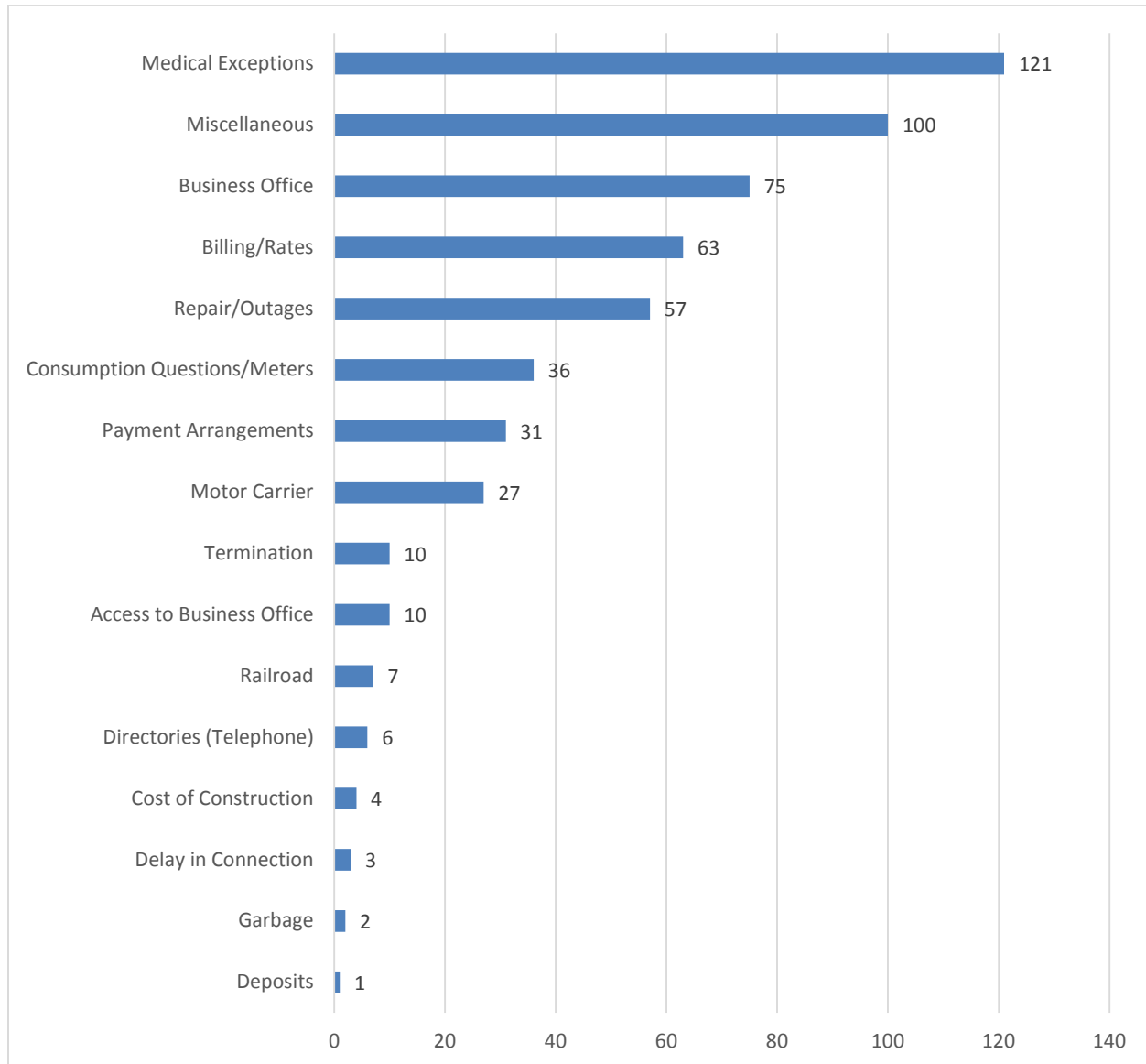
# Consumer Assistance by Utility January – June 2017 Total - 553



\* Of the 254 contacts regarding NorthWestern Energy, 121 were notifications from NWE of intent to proceed with disconnect on an account noted with a medical exception.

\*\* Requests for consumer assistance involving the following companies totaled 10 or less each: 3 Rivers Communications Long Distance, Alpine Pacific Utilities, AT&T, Big Sky Gas, CenturyLink Long Distance, Custom Teleconnect Inc., Energy West, Frontier/Citizens, HLH LLC, Integra Telecom, Montana Opticom, MontanaSky.Net web, Mountain Water Company, Project Telephone Company, Telmate LLC, United Telecom Inc., VarTec Telecom Inc., and Williams Water Works.

## Consumer Assistance by Category January – June 2017 Total - 553



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

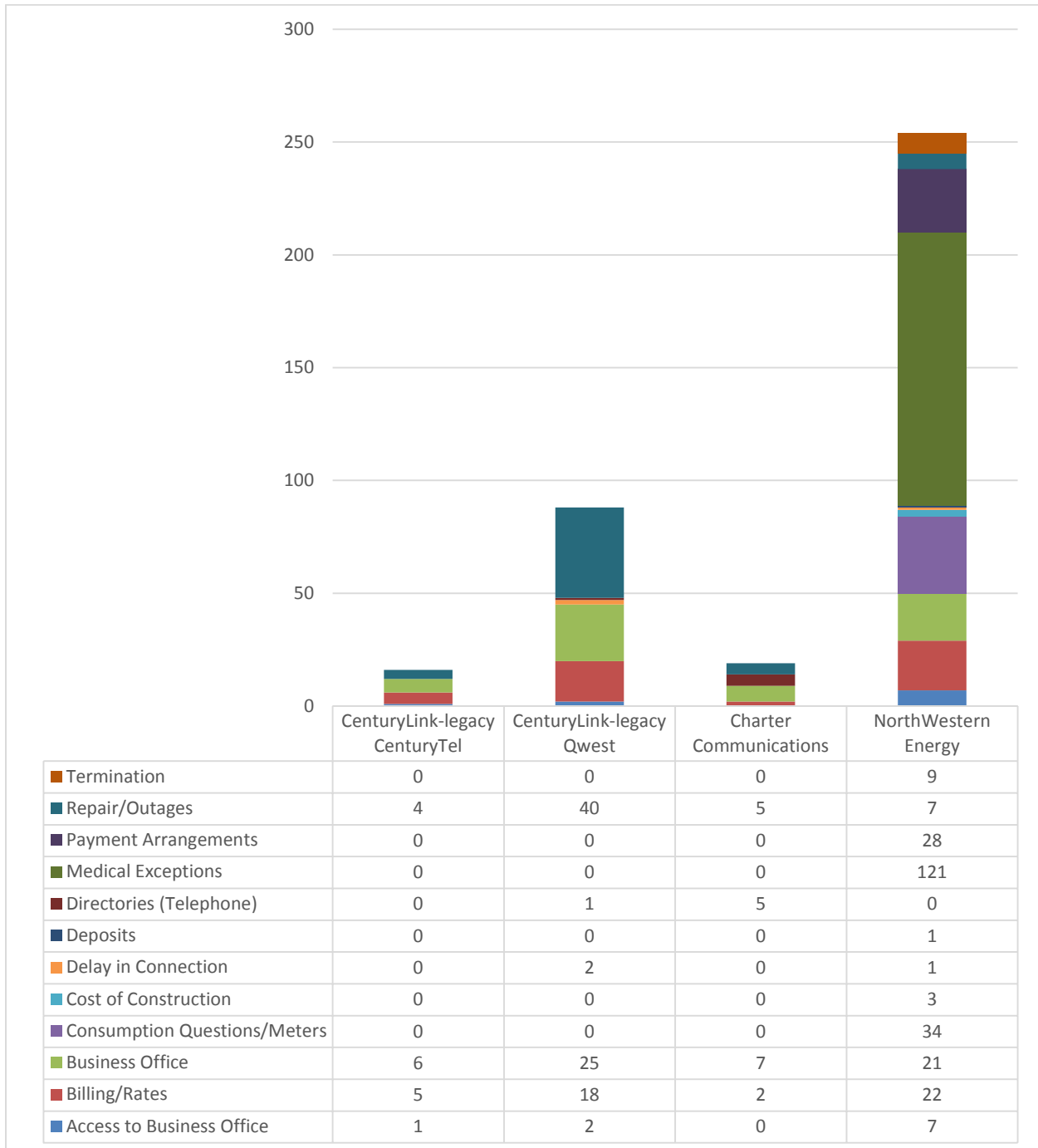
**Miscellaneous:** Requests for information that require research and response but do not require utility contact; and referrals on non-regulated products or to a non-regulated company

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

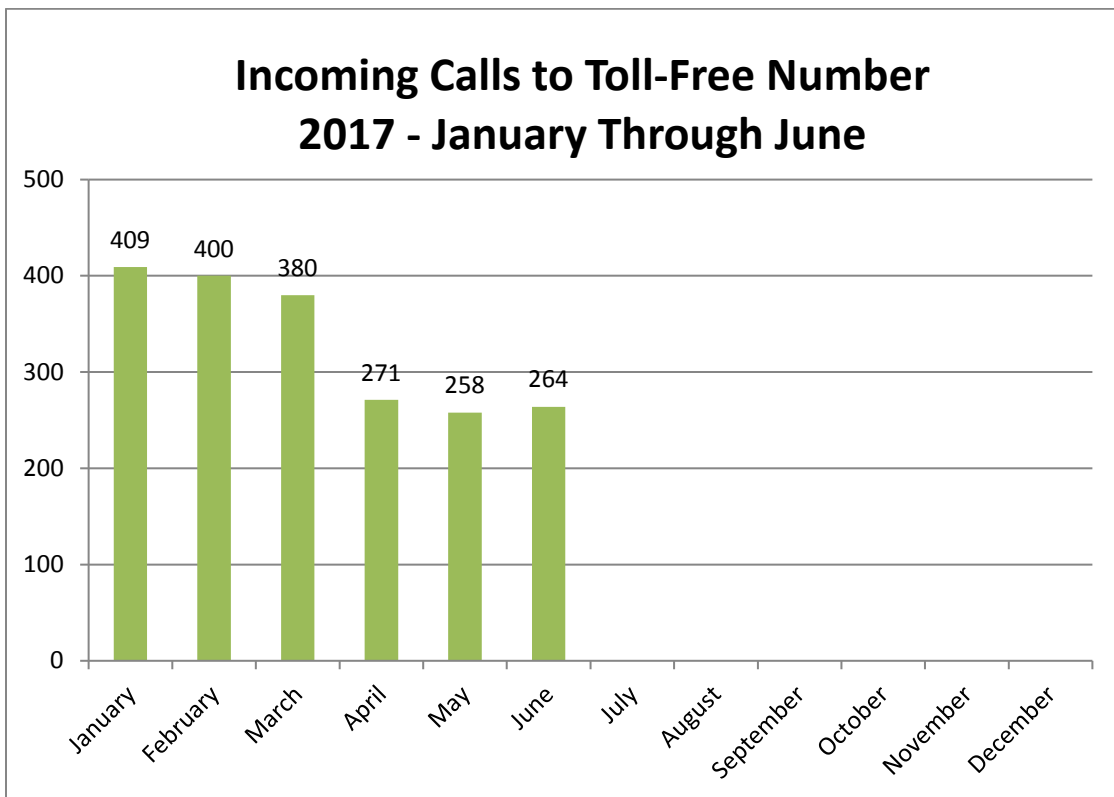
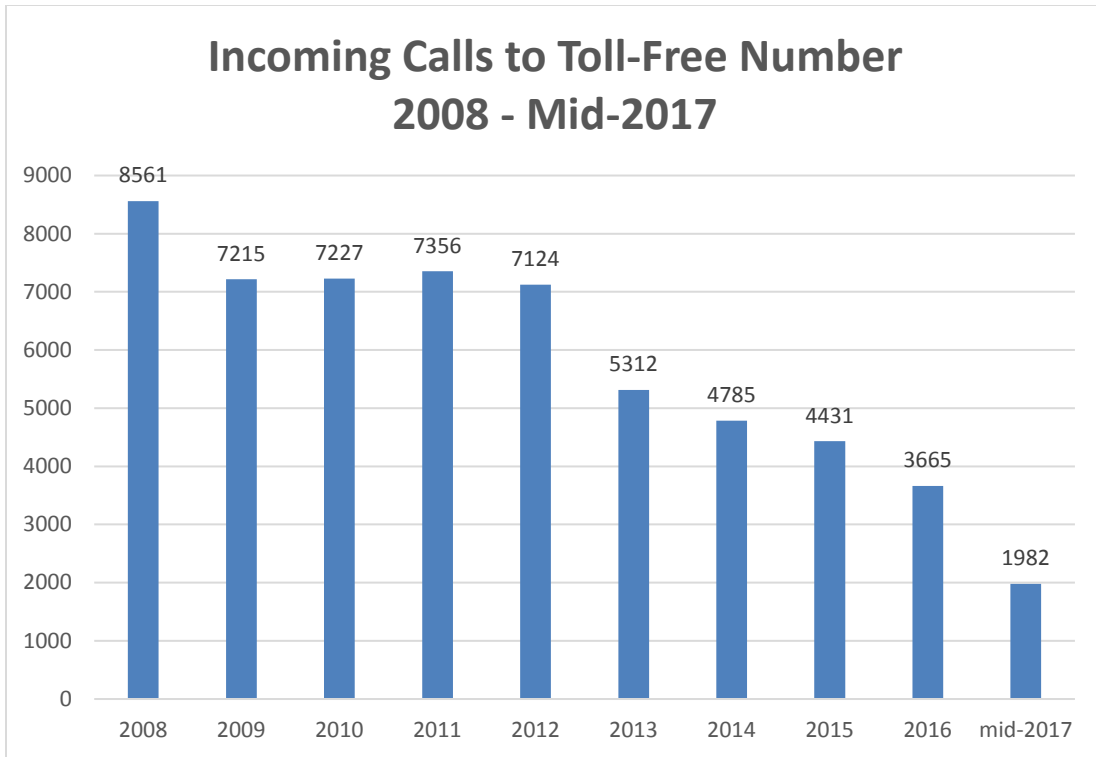
**Billing/Rates:** Incorrect billing, billing questions, collect call charges, calling plans, inmate calls

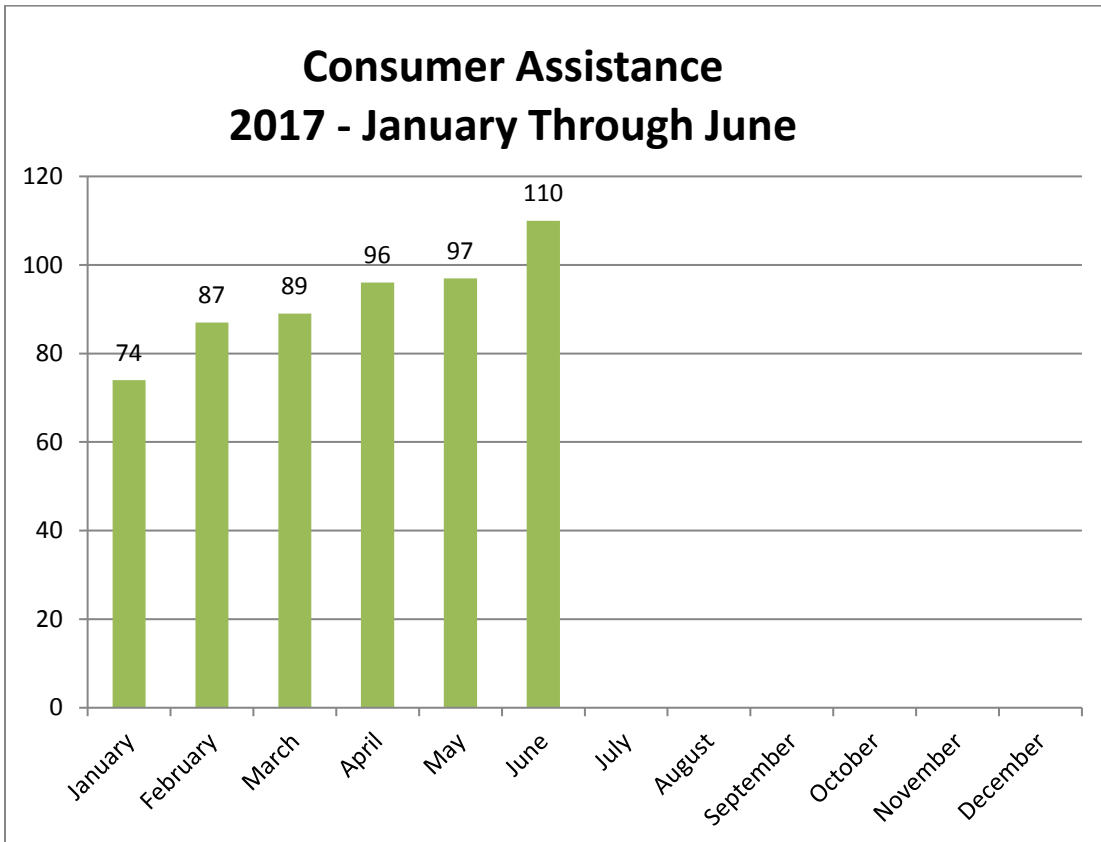
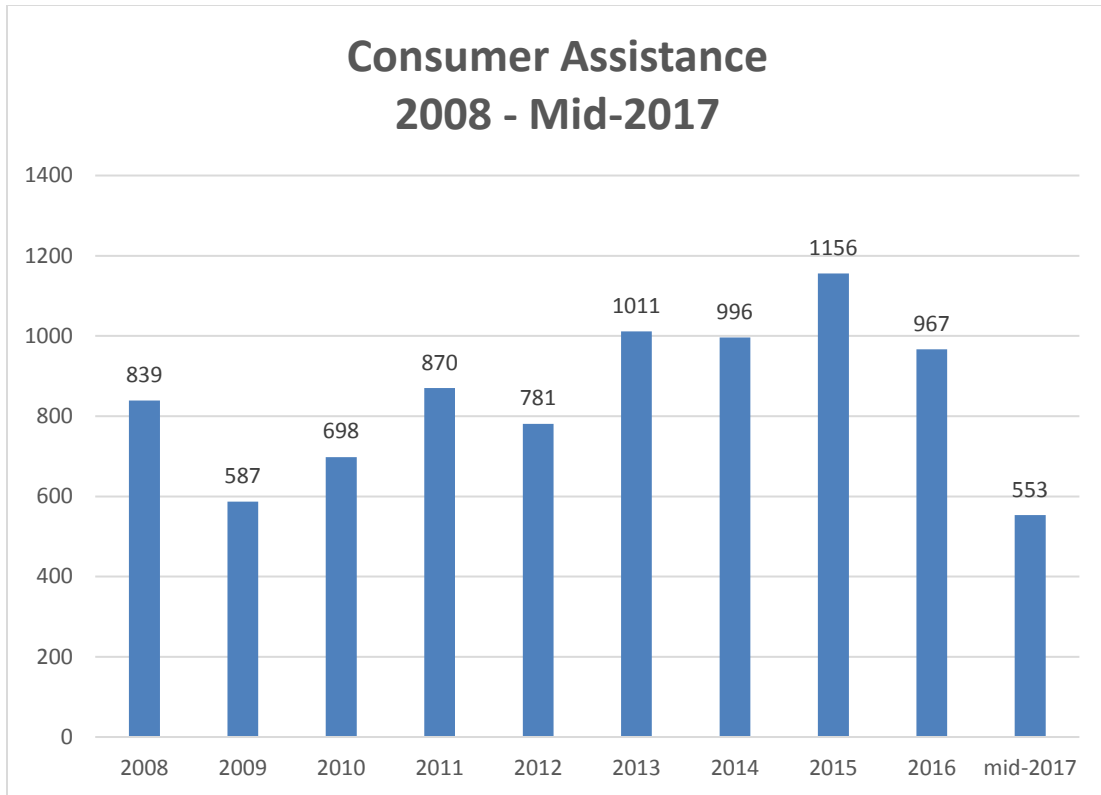
**Repair/Outages:** Utility service either completely out or needing repair

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

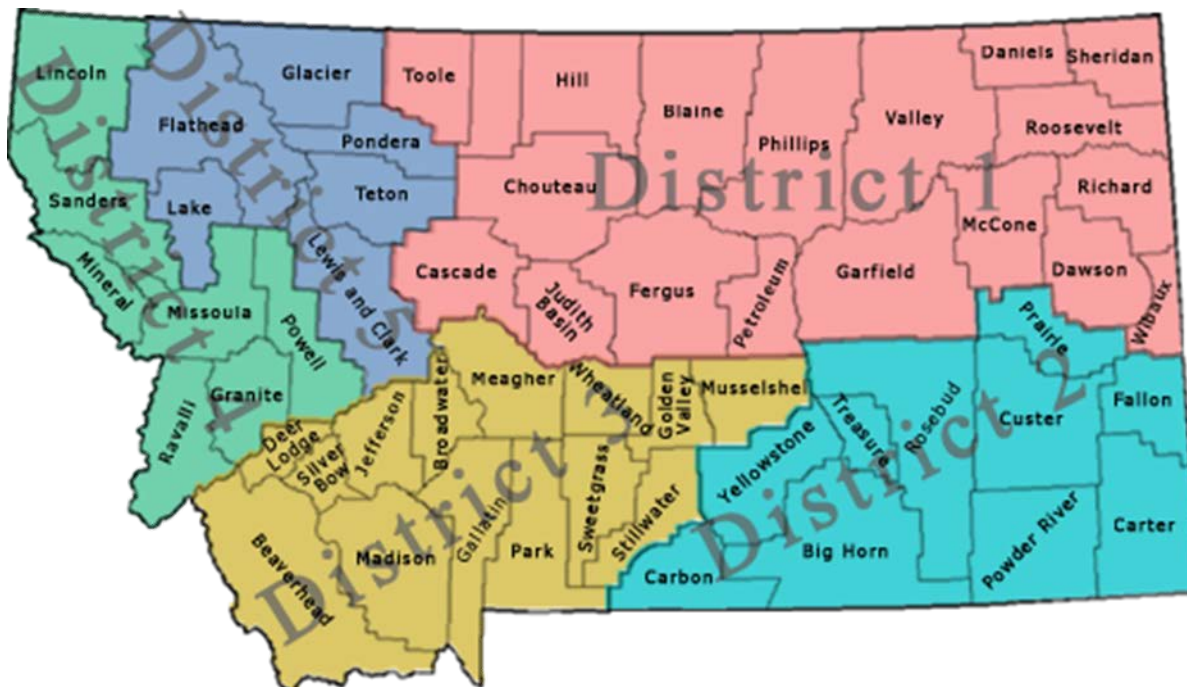












Commissioner District 1 - Travis Kavulla (2011-2018)  
 Commissioner District 2 – Tony O’Donnell (2017-2020)  
 Commissioner District 3 - Roger Koopman (2013-2020)  
 Commissioner District 4 - Bob Lake (2013-2020)  
 Commissioner District 5 – Brad Johnson (2015-2018)

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