

MONTANA  
PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION



*Consumer Assistance Program  
2018 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 (currently vacant).

Consumers contacted the Commission through the following means:

- 156 electronic methods (e-mail, social media, etc.);
- 43 letters received via the US Postal Service;
- 13 walk-ins; and
- An indeterminate number of phone calls received.

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. We also document “miscellaneous” contacts, which include inquiries that don’t require company contact, calls regarding non-regulated companies or topics, general information requests, etc. This report shows a spike in the “miscellaneous” category due to a more focused effort to document all contacts made to the Consumer Assistance Program.

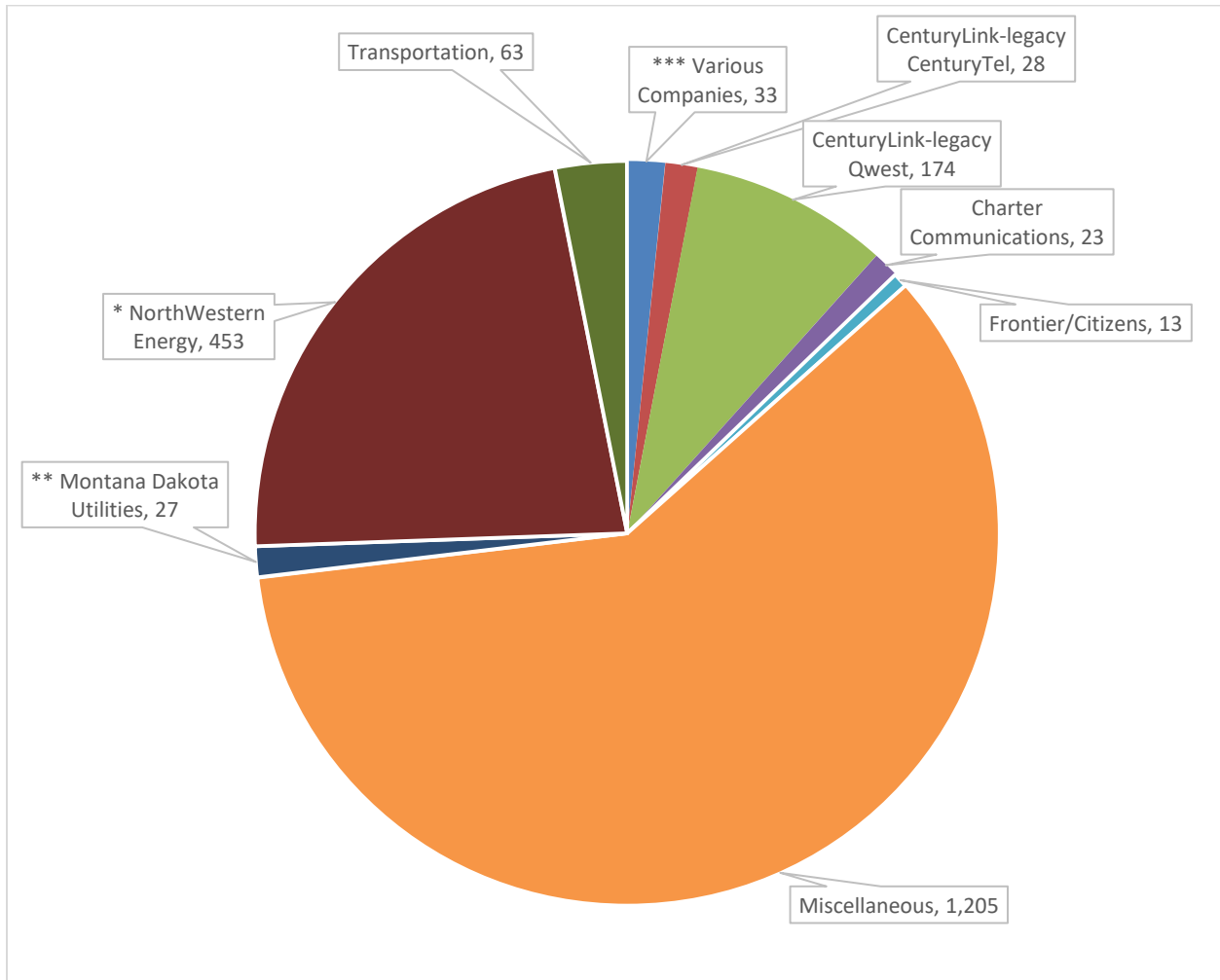
In addition to providing assistance to consumers, Consumer Assistance Program staff also participate in the following tasks:

- 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 2018.

---Tina Shorten, Manager  
Consumer Assistance Program

## Consumer Assistance by Utility January - December 2018 Total: 2,019

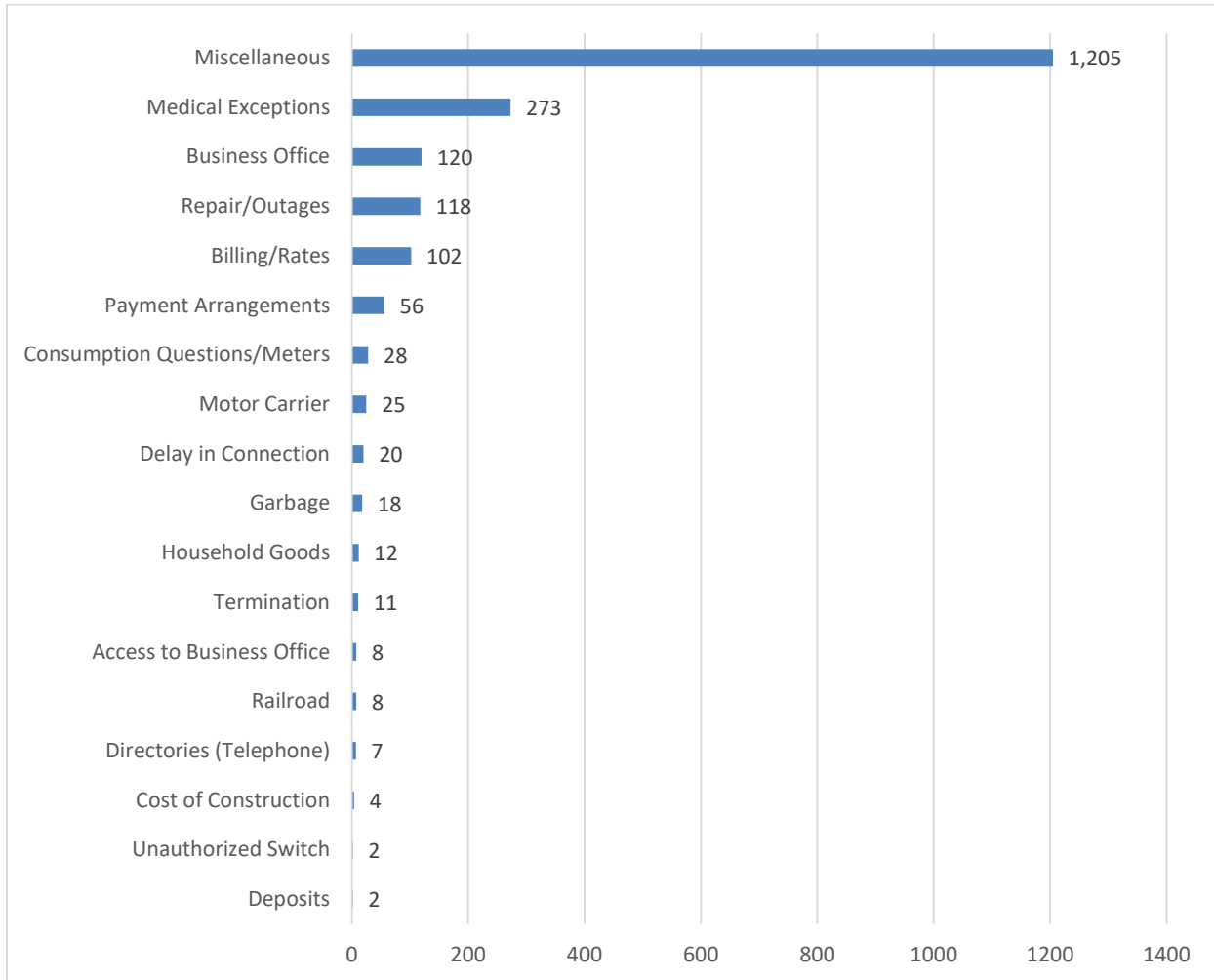


\* Of the 453 contacts regarding NorthWestern Energy (NWE), 270 were notifications from NWE of intent to proceed with disconnect on an account noted with a medical exception.

\*\* Of the 27 contacts regarding Montana Dakota Utilities (MDU), 3 were notifications from MDU 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: Big Sky Gas, USA Communications, CenturyLink Long Distance, Ceretel, Clearly Communiations, dishNet Wireline LLC, Energy West, HLH LLC, Integra Telecom, Landmark Water Company, Mitel, Montana Opticom, North Star Water and Sewer, Ooma, Project Telephone Company, Qwest Corporation, TCT West, Inc., Vitelity, and Williams Water Works.

## Consumer Assistance by Category January - December 2018 Total: 2,019



Explanation of top five categories:

**Miscellaneous:** Requests for information that don't require company contact, calls regarding non-regulated companies or topics, general information requests. This category is high due to a focused effort to document all contacts made to the Consumer Assistance Program.

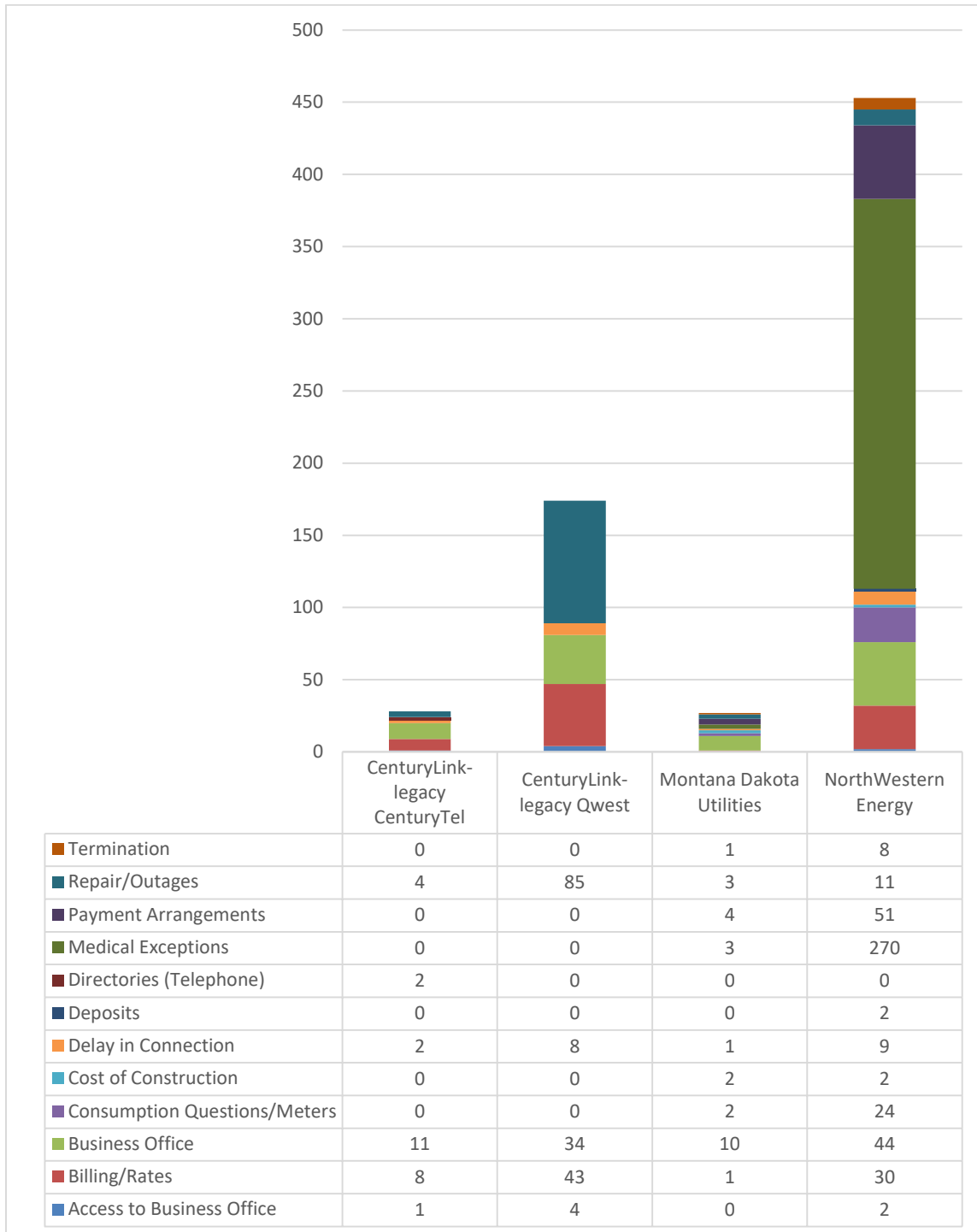
**Medical Exceptions:** Notification from a utility company of intent to proceed with disconnect on an account noted with a medical exception.

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

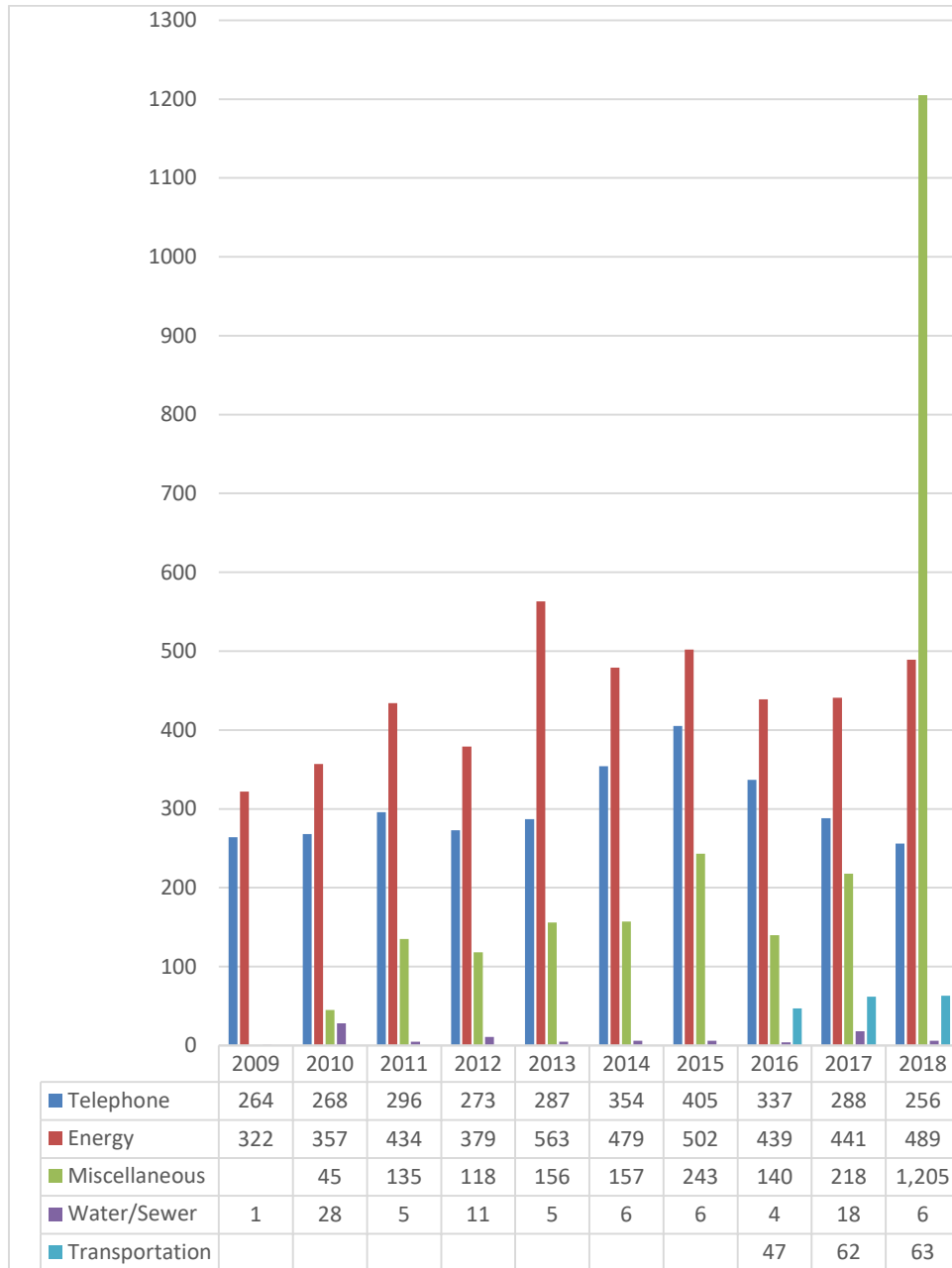
**Repair/Outages:** Utility service either completely out or needing repair.

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

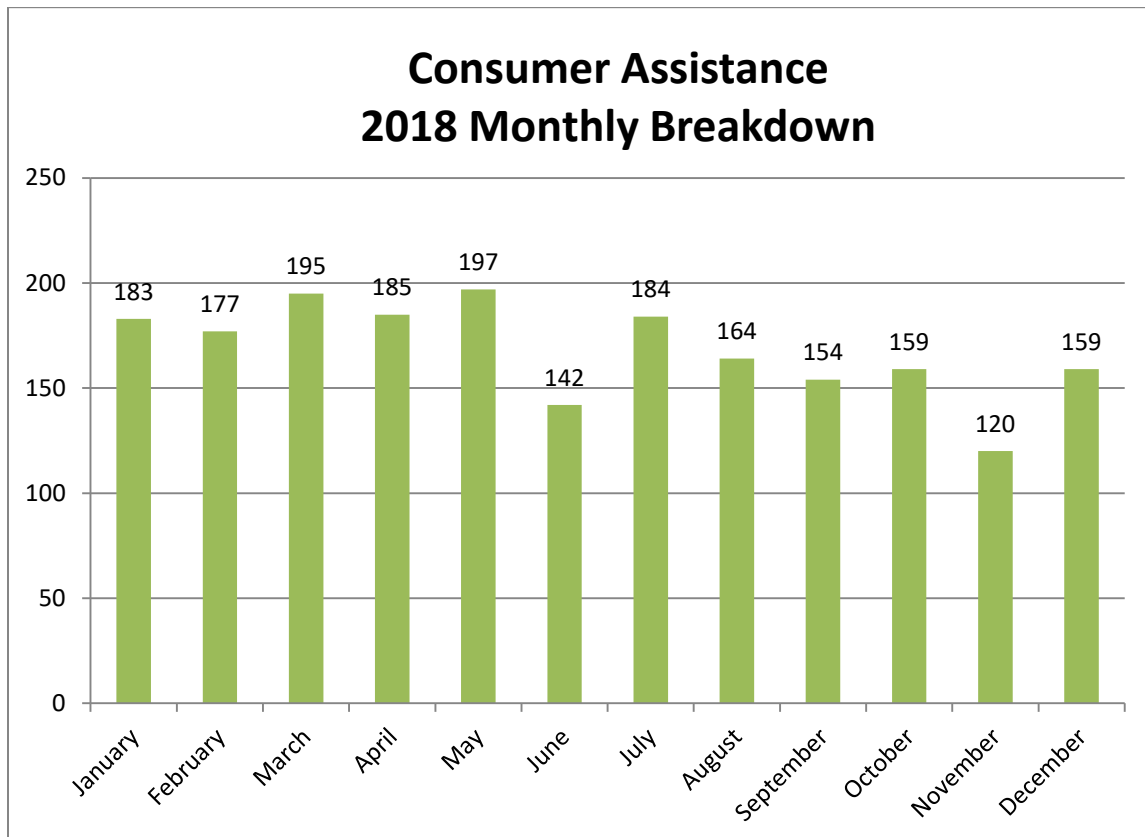
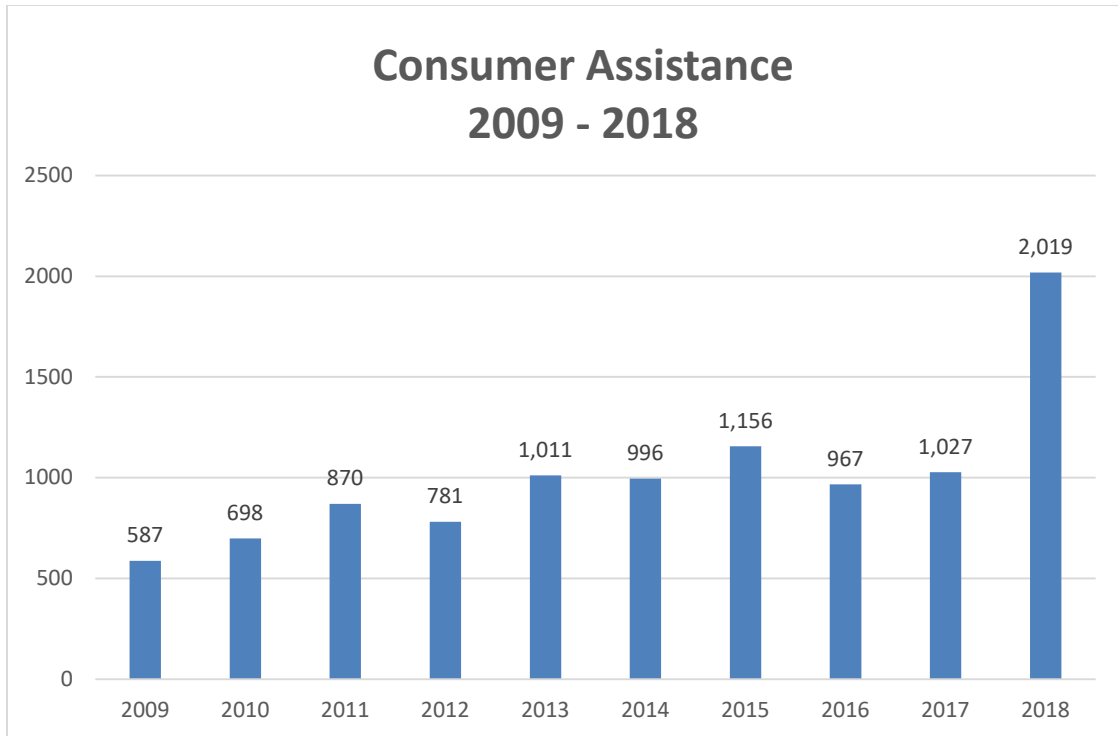
## Breakdown by Category for Companies With Highest Volume of Consumer Assistance Requests January - December 2018

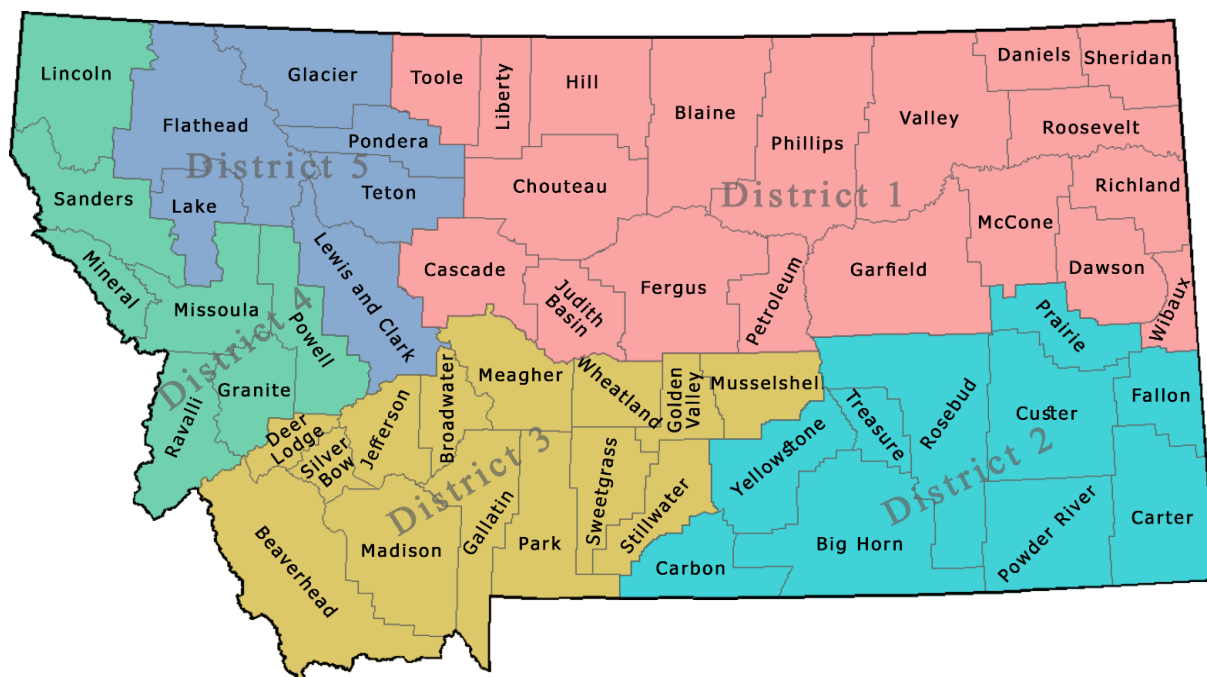


## Consumer Assistance by General Service Type 2009 through 2018



The spike in the “Miscellaneous” category in 2018 is due to a more focused effort to document ALL contacts made to the Consumer Assistance Program.





Commissioner District 1 - Travis Kavulla (2011-2018)  
 Commissioner-Elect District 1 – Randall Pinocci (2019-2022)  
 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 (2015-2022)

Montana Public Service Commission  
 1701 Prospect Avenue  
 PO Box 202601  
 Helena MT 59620

(800) 646-6150 consumer assistance toll-free number  
 (406) 444-6150 consumer assistance local number  
 (406) 444-6199 PSC main phone number  
 (406) 444-7618 fax number

Commission website: [www.psc.mt.gov](http://www.psc.mt.gov)  
 Consumer assistance e-mail: [pschelp@mt.gov](mailto:pschelp@mt.gov)

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