

MONTANA
PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION



*Consumer Assistance Program
2018 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.

Consumers contacted the Commission through the following means:

- 77 electronic methods (e-mail, social media, etc.);
- 19 letters received via the US Postal Service;
- 7 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.

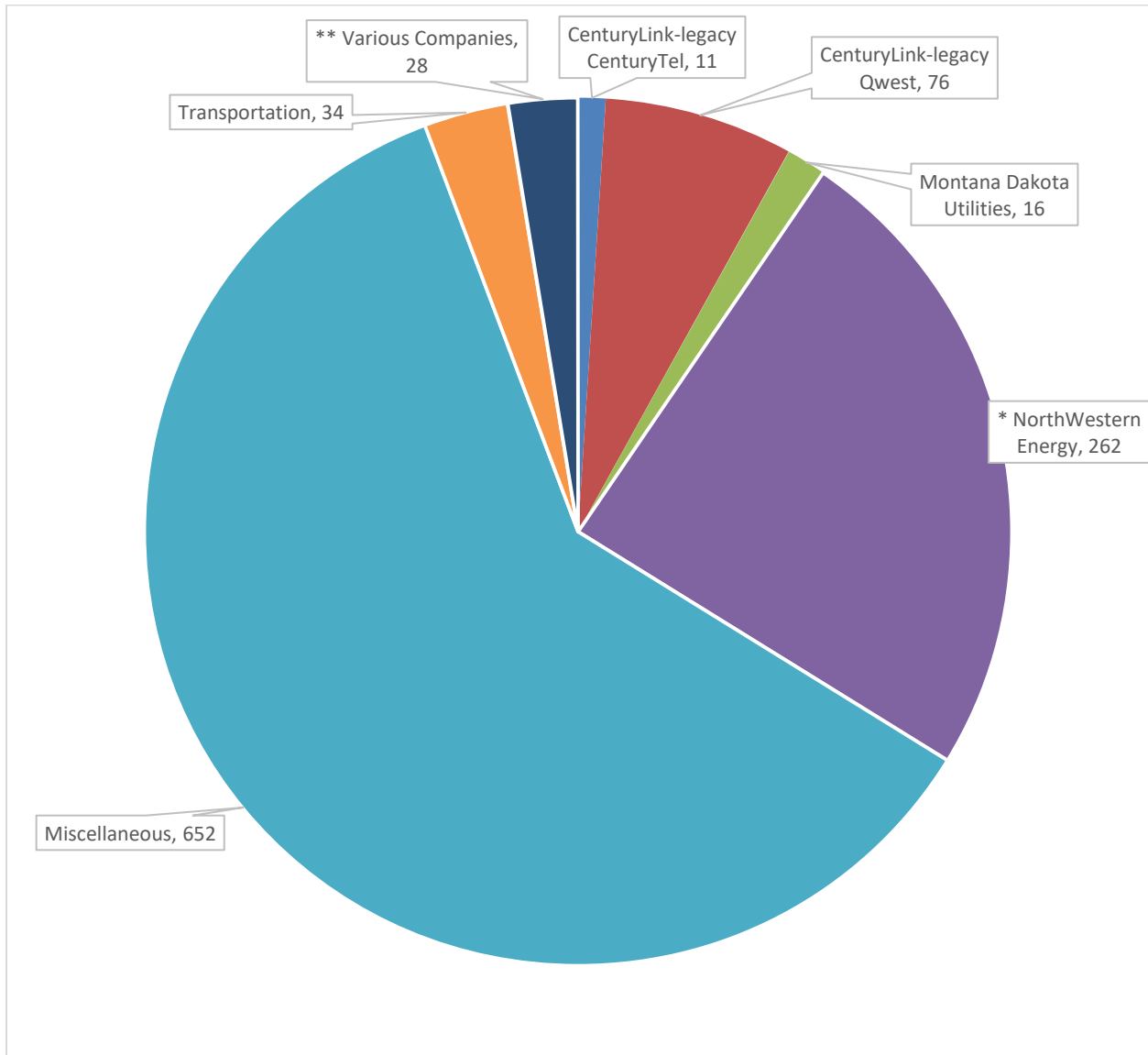
In addition to providing assistance to consumers, Consumer Assistance Program staff also participate in the following tasks:

- 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 the first half of 2018.

---Tina Shorten, Manager
Consumer Assistance Program

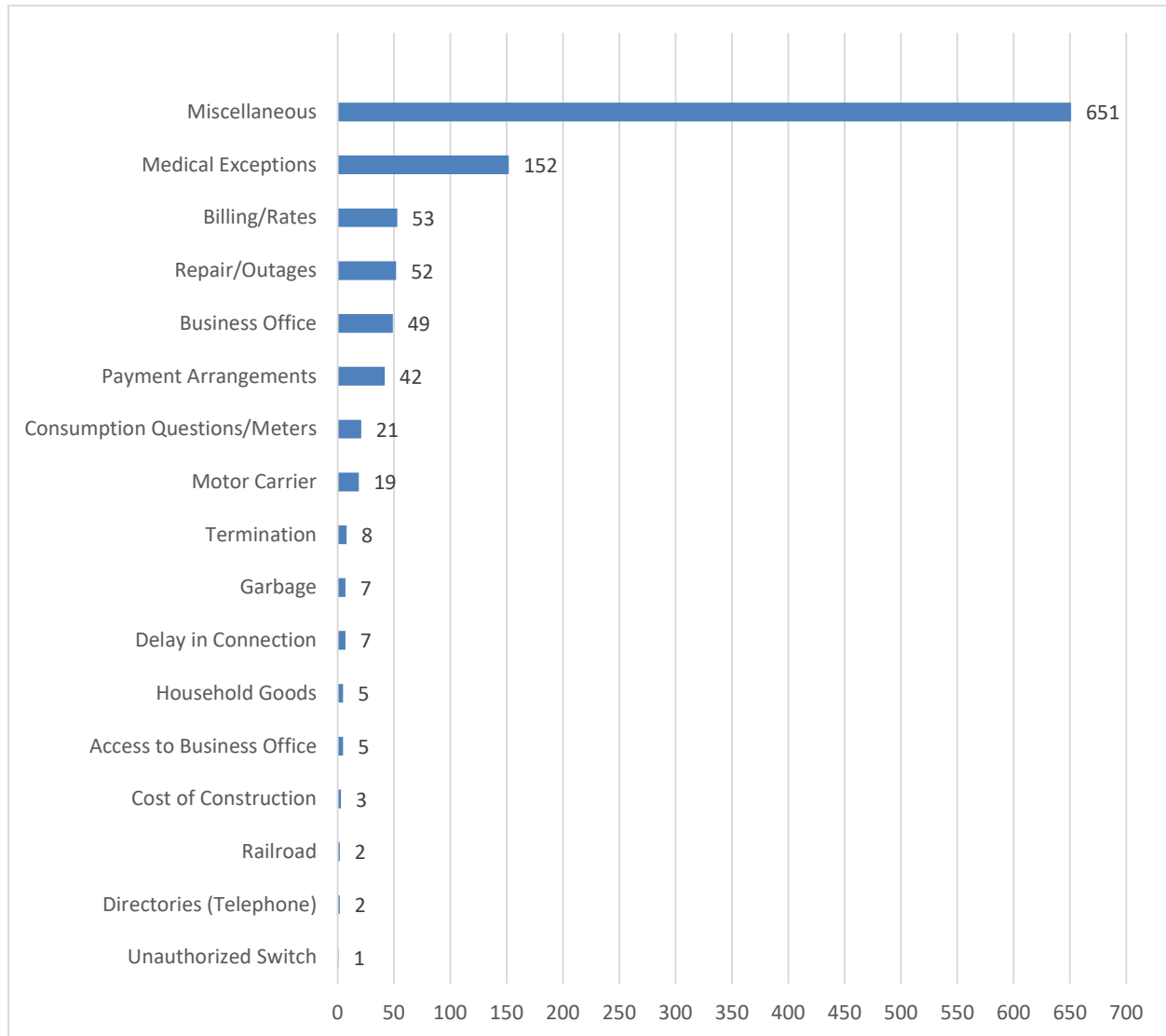
**Consumer Assistance by Utility
January - June 2018
Total: 1,079**



* Of the 262 contacts regarding NorthWestern Energy (NWE), 152 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: Big Sky Gas, USA Communications, CenturyLink Long Distance, Charter Communications, Energy West, Frontier/Citizens, HLH LLC, North Star Water and Sewer, Ooma, TCT West, Inc., and Vitivity.

Consumer Assistance by Category January - June 2018 Total: 1,079



Explanation of top five categories:

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.

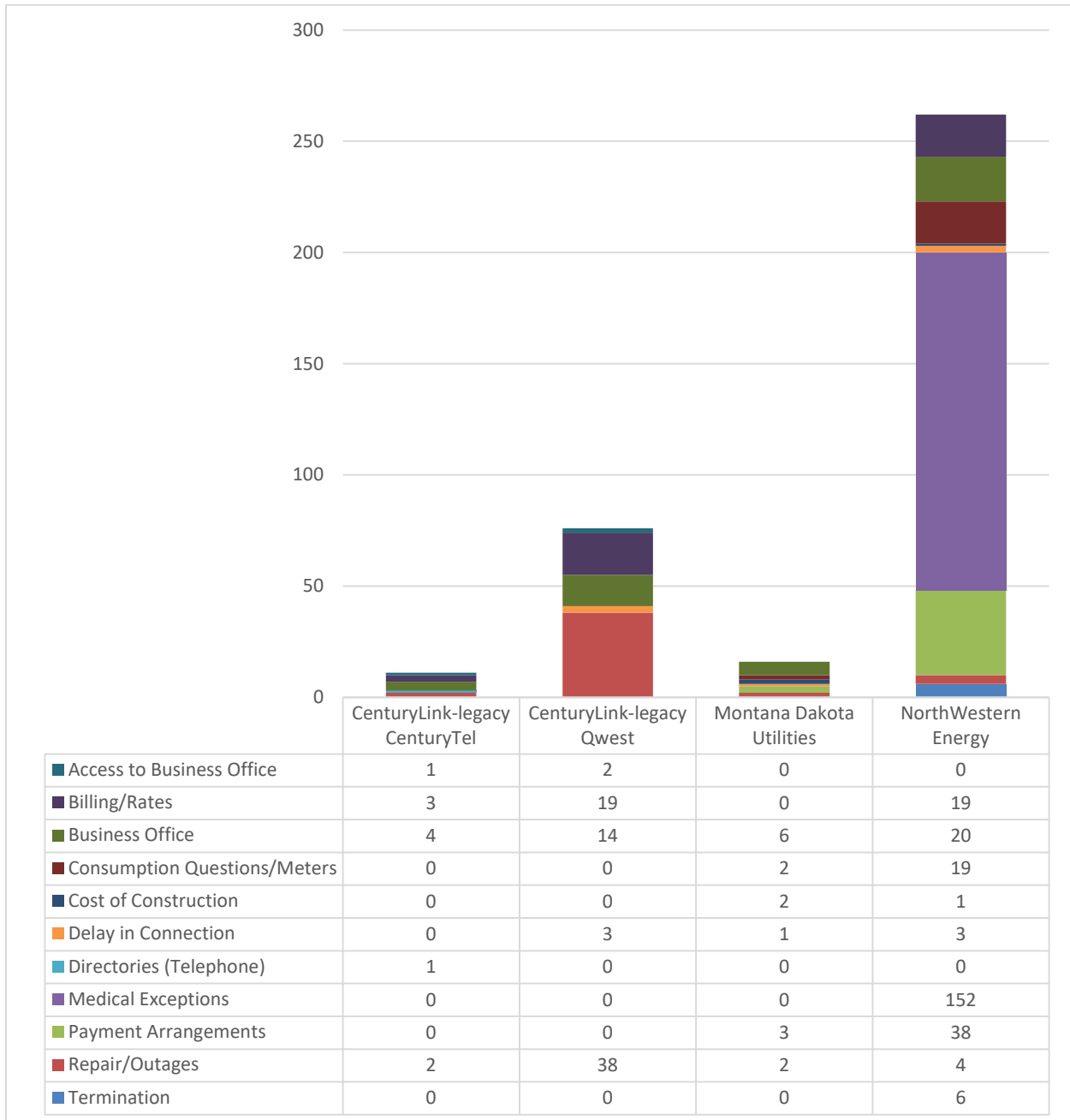
Medical Exceptions: Notification from a utility company of intent to proceed with disconnect on an account noted with a medical exception.

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

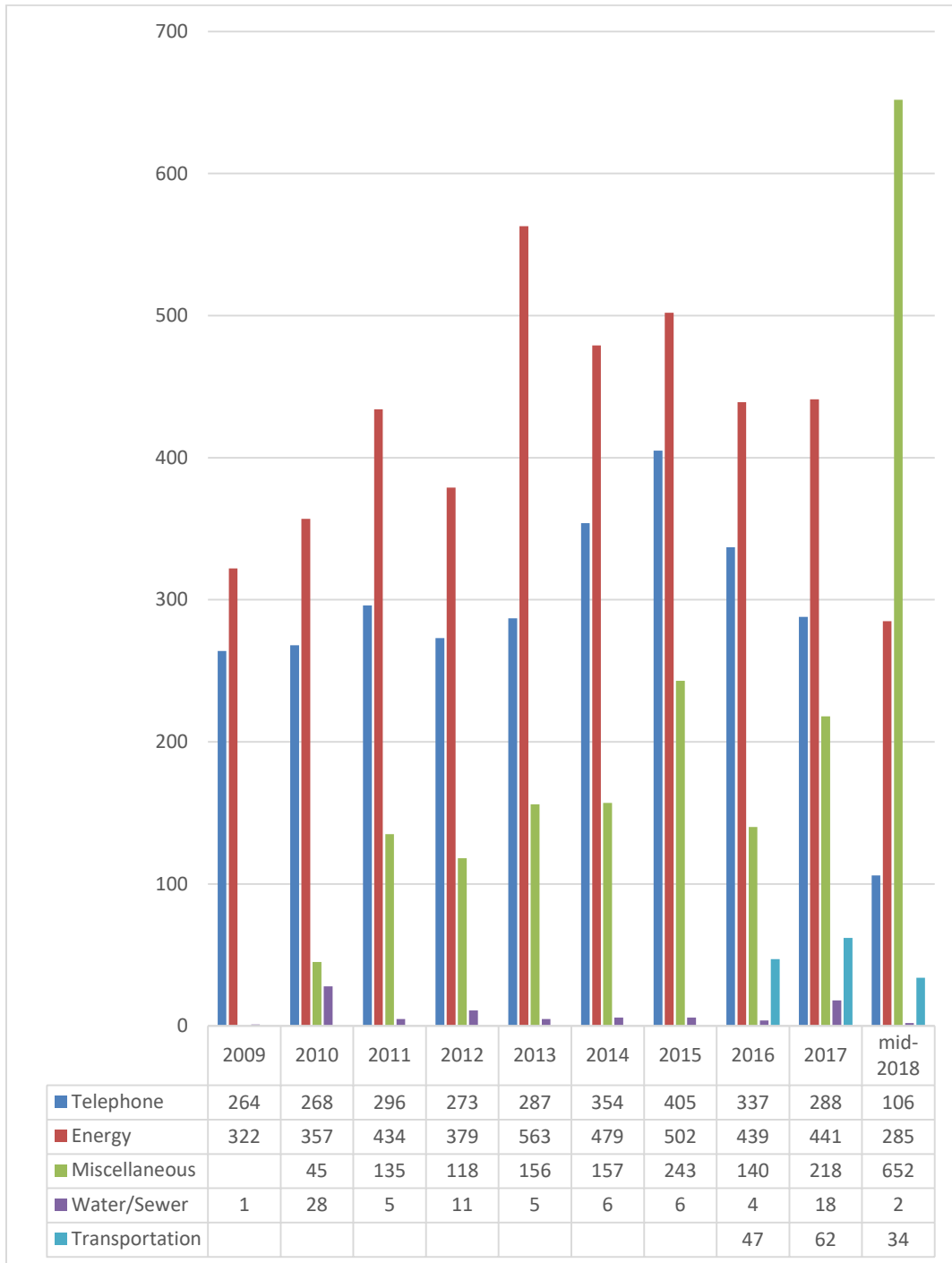
Repair/Outages: Utility service either completely out or needing repair.

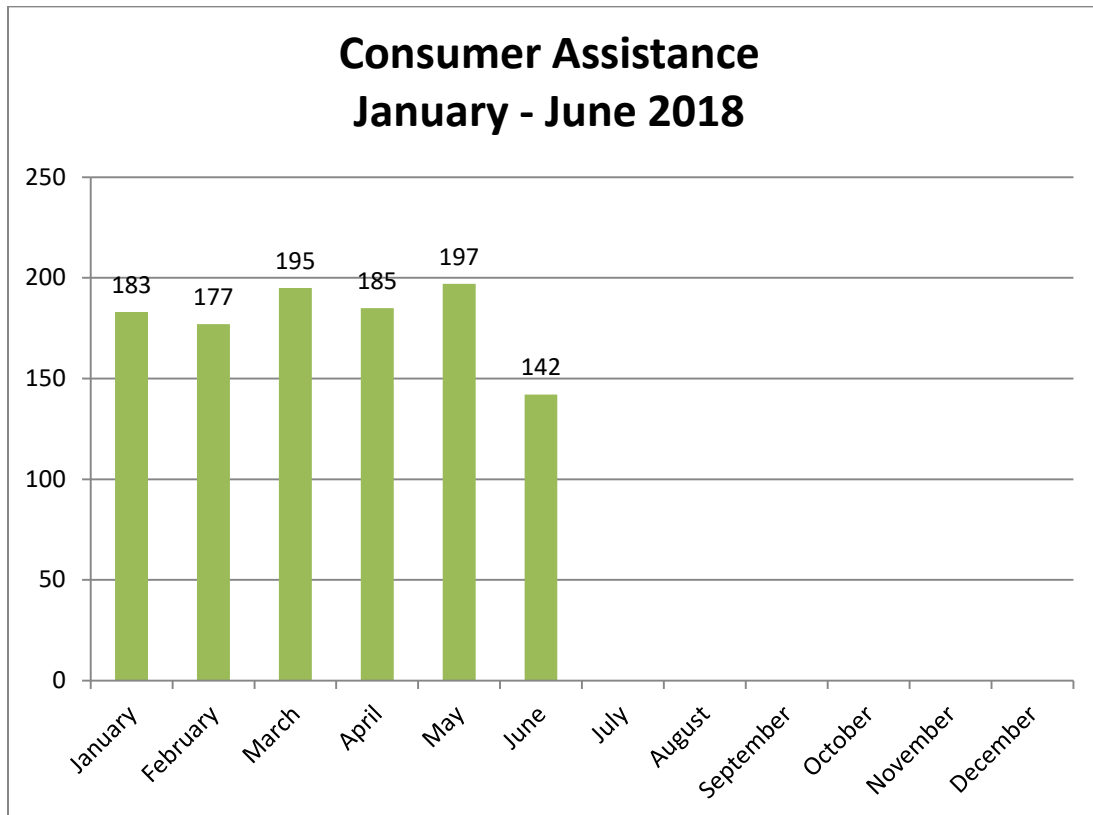
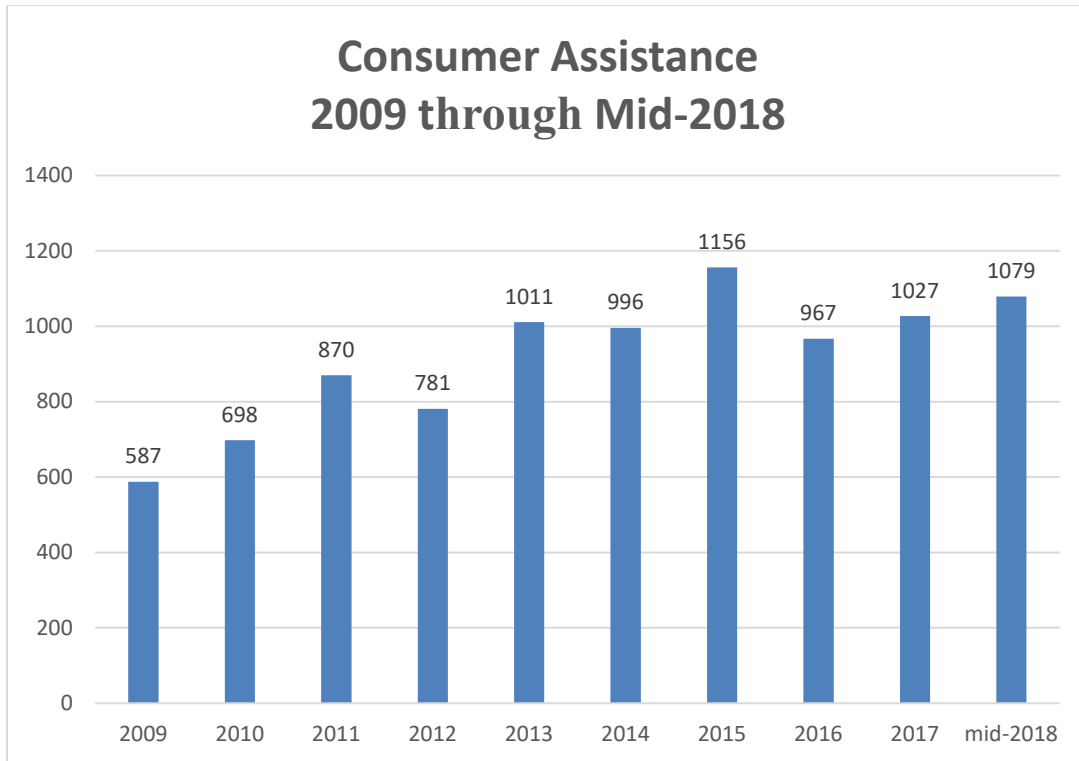
Business Office: Company personnel, misinformation, anything that doesn't fit elsewhere.

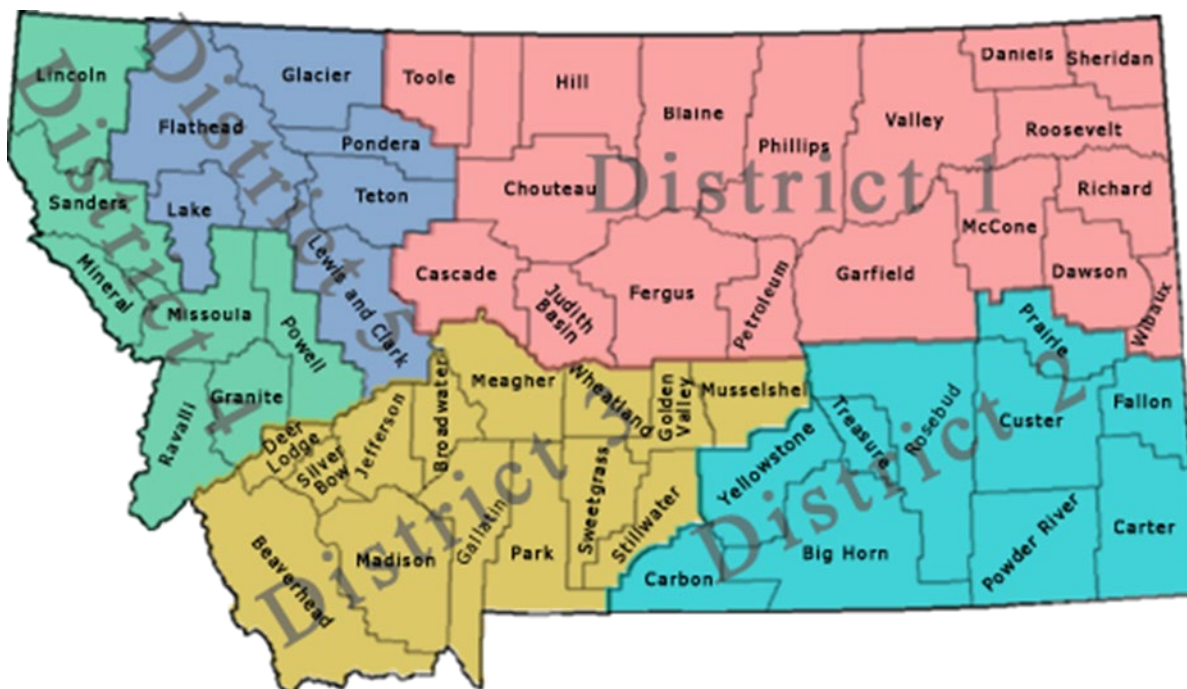
Breakdown by Category for Companies With Highest Volume of Consumer Assistance Requests January - June 2018



Consumer Assistance by General Service Type 2009 through Mid-2018







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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(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
 Consumer assistance e-mail: pschelp@mt.gov

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