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GOVERNOR KATHY HOCHUL

**GOVERNOR HOCHUL ANNOUNCES NEW YORK STATE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION
RETURNED NEARLY \$4.2 MILLION TO CONSUMERS IN 2022**

*Department's Office of Consumer Services Aided Approximately 68,000 New Yorkers
with Utility Complaints in 2022*

*As Part of National Consumer Protection Week, New York's Utility Regulator Details
How It Directly Assists Consumers*

As a part of National Consumer Protection Week, Governor Kathy Hochul today announced that the Office of Consumer Services at the New York State Department of Public Service - the staff arm of the Public Service Commission - assisted 68,000 New York households with a variety of consumer protection matters in 2022, resulting in the Department returning nearly \$4.2 million to consumers. This year, National Consumer Protection Week runs from March 5 to March 11.

"Hard-working New Yorkers deserve compensation when they are overcharged or inaccurately billed by their utility," **Governor Hochul said**. "I'm proud of my administration's efforts to respond to thousands of utility complaints and return millions of dollars to New York households - holding companies accountable and bolstering consumer protections."

The Department's Office of Consumer Services monitors the number and types of complaints received against all utilities operating in New York State to ensure that utilities fulfill their obligation to provide effective customer service in compliance with the laws, rules, regulations and policies. Each month, the Office of Consumer Services makes public a detailed overview of complaint activity and utility responsiveness that is informative to both consumers and utility companies.

Commission Chair Rory M. Christian said, "The Commission and Department are focused on resolving utility complaints for the State's consumers and ensuring utilities comply with consumer protection regulations. This focus enables us to promote our historic mission and activities on behalf of the public interest and helps ensure that utilities provide refunds to consumers when the utilities make a mistake."

The Department's Office of Consumer Services also monitors complaints against the competitive energy service companies (ESCO's) operating in New York.

In addition to its ongoing Central Hudson Gas & Electric Corp. billing investigation, the Department recently expanded its investigation into New York State Electric & Gas Corp. (NYSEG) and Rochester Gas and Electric Corp. (RG&E) regarding potential mismanagement

of their utilities' billing systems and protocols. As part of the investigation, the Department's Consumer Advocate hosted a series of public forums in affected areas in January and February 2023 to hear consumer concerns first-hand. The problems with the NYSEG and RG&E billing systems became apparent when the Department began to see a significant spike in the number of complaints from customers.

As a direct result of the spike in consumer complaints, Department staff commenced a review and an investigation related to a change to the companies' customer information and billing system. The complaints received by the Department range from incorrect bills being sent to consumers or very late bills being sent. In 2022, the number of consumer complaints against the two companies soared to more than 4,700, 60 percent more than the two previous years combined.

In terms of added consumer protections, the Department will begin regulating energy brokers in 2023. Legislation recently signed into law will require persons, firms, associations or corporations acting as an energy broker or consultant to register with the Department. Further, the Governor has proposed \$200 million in relief for utility bills for up to 800,000 New York households earning under \$75,000 a year to support expansion of the Commission's Energy Affordability Policy program in 2023-2024, after having implemented historic consumer and small business arrears relief in 2022.

In addition, Governor Hochul proposed \$200 million for the EmPower Plus program to help 20,000 low-income families retrofit their homes by adding insulation, installing energy efficient appliances, and where eligible, switching from inefficient fossil fuel heating systems to clean, efficient electric alternatives. Homes that qualify to be electrified through the EmPower Plus program will be eligible for the Energy Affordability Guarantee once they are fully electrified. This Energy Affordability Guarantee will ensure participating low-income New Yorkers will never pay more than six percent of their income on electricity. Together, the EmPower Plus and Energy Affordability Guarantee programs will combine weatherization and electrification measures as well as affordability protections that will drastically cut energy use, improve home comfort, and deliver significant greenhouse gas emissions reductions.

As part of its consumer assistance programs, the Department provides consumers with comprehensive, clear educational materials and guidance to assist them in reducing their energy bills, preparing for winter and summer's extreme cold and heat, and learning and exercising their rights under New York's nation-leading utility consumer protection laws, the Home Energy Fair Practices Act (HEFPA). Department staff also informs, educates and empowers consumers through live outreach presentations statewide, rich consumer education resources, and timely social media consumer information campaigns.

To file consumer complaints against a utility or to receive more consumer services information, click [here](#) or call the Department's helpline at 800-342-3377, Monday through Friday, 8:30am-4:00pm. You may contact the Department in writing at the NYS Dept. of Public Service Office of Consumer Services, Three Empire State Plaza, Albany, NY 12223-1350.

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