

STATE OF NEW YORK

9572

IN ASSEMBLY

January 24, 2020

Introduced by M. of A. DINOWITZ -- read once and referred to the Committee on Consumer Affairs and Protection

AN ACT to amend the public service law, in relation to creating the state office of the utility consumer advocate

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

1 Section 1. The public service law is amended by adding a new article
2 1-A to read as follows:

ARTICLE 1-A

THE STATE OFFICE OF THE UTILITY CONSUMER ADVOCATE

Section 28-a. Definitions.

6 28-b. Establishment of the state office of the utility consumer
7 advocate.

8 28-c. Powers of the state office of the utility consumer advo-
9 cate.

10 28-d. Reports.

11 § 28-a. Definitions. When used in this article: (a) "Department"
12 means the department of public service.

13 (b) "Commission" means the public service commission.

14 (c) "Residential utility customer" means any person who is sold or
15 offered for sale residential utility service by a utility company.

16 (d) "Utility company" means any person or entity operating an agency
17 for public service, including, but not limited to, those persons or
18 entities subject to the jurisdiction, supervision and regulations
19 prescribed by or pursuant to the provisions of this chapter.

20 § 28-b. Establishment of the state office of the utility consumer
21 advocate. There is established the state office of the utility consumer
22 advocate to represent the interests of residential utility customers.
23 The utility consumer advocate shall be appointed by the governor to a
24 term of six years, upon the advice and consent of the senate. The utili-
25 ty consumer advocate shall possess knowledge and experience in matters
26 affecting residential utility customers and shall be responsible for the
27 direction, control, and operation of the state office of the utility
28 consumer advocate, including its hiring of staff and retention of

EXPLANATION--Matter in italics (underscored) is new; matter in brackets
[-] is old law to be omitted.

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1 experts for analysis and testimony in proceedings. The utility consumer
2 advocate shall not be removed for cause, but may be removed only after
3 notice and opportunity to be heard, and only for permanent disability,
4 malfeasance, a felony, or conduct involving moral turpitude. Exercise of
5 independent judgment in advocating positions on behalf of residential
6 utility customers shall not constitute cause for removal of the utility
7 consumer advocate.

8 § 28-c. Powers of the state office of the utility consumer advocate.
9 The state office of the utility consumer advocate shall have the power
10 and duty to: (a) initiate, intervene in, or participate on behalf of
11 residential utility customers in any proceedings before the commission,
12 the federal energy regulatory commission, the federal communications
13 commission, federal, state and local administrative and regulatory agen-
14 cies, and state and federal courts in any matter or proceeding that may
15 substantially affect the interests of residential utility customers,
16 including, but not limited to, a proposed change of rates, charges,
17 terms and conditions of service, the adoption of rules, regulations,
18 guidelines, orders, standards or final policy decisions where the utili-
19 ty consumer advocate deems such initiation, intervention or partic-
20 ipation to be necessary or appropriate;

21 (b) represent the interests of residential utility customers of the
22 state before federal, state and local administrative and regulatory
23 agencies engaged in the regulation of energy, telecommunications, water,
24 and other utility services, and before state and federal courts in
25 actions and proceedings to review the actions of utilities or orders of
26 utility regulatory agencies. Any action or proceeding brought by the
27 utility consumer advocate before a court or an agency shall be brought
28 in the name of the state office of the utility consumer advocate. The
29 utility consumer advocate may join with a residential utility customer
30 or group of residential utility customers in bringing an action;

31 (c) (i) in addition to any other authority conferred upon the utility
32 consumer advocate, he or she is authorized, and it shall be his or her
33 duty to represent the interests of residential utility customers as a
34 party, or otherwise participate for the purpose of representing the
35 interests of such customers before any agencies or courts. He or she may
36 initiate proceedings if in his or her judgment doing so may be necessary
37 in connection with any matter involving the actions or regulation of
38 public utility companies whether on appeal or otherwise initiated. The
39 utility consumer advocate may monitor all cases before regulatory agen-
40 cies in the United States, including the federal communications commis-
41 sion and the federal energy regulatory commission that affect the inter-
42 ests of residential utility customers of the state and may formally
43 participate in those proceedings which in his or her judgment warrants
44 such participation.

45 (ii) the utility consumer advocate shall exercise his or her independ-
46 ent discretion in determining the interests of residential utility
47 customers that will be advocated in any proceeding, and determining
48 whether to participate in or initiate any proceeding and, in so deter-
49 mining, shall consider the public interest, the resources available, and
50 the substantiality of the effect of the proceeding on the interest of
51 residential utility customers;

52 (d) request and receive from any state or local authority, agency,
53 department or division of the state or political subdivision such
54 assistance, personnel, information, books, records, other documentation
55 and cooperation necessary to perform its duties; and

1 (e) enter into cooperative agreements with other government offices to
2 efficiently carry out its work.

3 § 28-d. Reports. On July first, two thousand twenty-one and annually
4 thereafter, the state office of the utility consumer advocate shall
5 issue a report to the governor and the legislature, and make such report
6 available to the public free of charge on a publicly available website,
7 containing, but not limited to, the following information:

8 (a) all proceedings that the state office of the utility consumer
9 advocate participated in and the outcome of such proceedings, to the
10 extent of such outcome and if not confidential;

11 (b) estimated savings to residential utility consumers that resulted
12 from intervention by the state office of the utility consumer advocate;
13 and

14 (c) policy recommendations and suggested statutory amendments that the
15 state office of the utility consumer advocate deems necessary.

16 § 2. This act shall take effect on the first of April next succeeding
17 the date on which it shall have become a law.