



Public Service Commission

NEWS RELEASE
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For Immediate Release, Contact:
Julie Fedorchak, (701) 391-1140
Brian Kroshus, (701) 471-7965
Randy Christmann, (701) 328-4091

PSC Receives More Than 600 Consumer Contacts in 2018

BISMARCK, ND – The North Dakota Public Service Commission (PSC) today reported that the agency received 611 consumer contacts in 2018. These contacts include informal complaints against regulated entities, public input submitted as part of an open case, referrals to other agencies and/or requests for information.

Complaints are received and processed regarding any utility the Commission regulates, including certain aspects of telephone service, natural gas providers, and the three investor-owned electric companies in the state: Xcel, Otter Tail and MDU. Of the 611 contacts, 102 (17%) were complaints against companies regulated by the Commission. Complaint numbers for the three regulated electric companies were all consistent with previous years. Complaints for the telecommunications company CenturyLink decreased from 88 in 2017 to 33 in 2018. The majority of those complaints were due to prolonged outages or customers who experience frequent outages. Upgrades were completed by the company in some areas of western North Dakota that have helped decrease these outages. A significant increase was also noted in the grain warehouse licensing program related to an insolvency case that was started in late 2018.

“We hear from the public on a wide variety of issues ranging from the accuracy of gas pumps to reclamation on energy-related projects,” said Commissioner Julie Fedorchak, who holds the Consumer Affairs Portfolio. “Input from the public is very valuable to us, and we do our best in every instance to address the concerns whenever possible and help people get their issues resolved.”

In addition to recording complaints and concerns, the Commission also receives public input for cases being considered by the Commission. Public input is most often received for siting cases where the Commission is looking at permitting new transmission projects like pipelines, electric transmission lines and wind farms or for rate cases. The comments can be either in support or opposition of the project. In 2018 there were 123 public input contacts recorded or 20 percent of the total contacts. The majority of these comments were submitted for new wind energy projects. This number is up from 2017 where 92 public input contacts were recorded.

“Having an open dialogue with the public is essential to good government,” said Commission Chairman Brian Kroshus. “We continuously look for ways to improve processes and procedures and most importantly, expand communication channels, to better serve citizens of our state.”

The PSC reinstated a Consumer Affairs Portfolio in 2014, which provides additional focus on consumer issues and complaints and on improving communication with the public through traditional public information channels, public meetings and social media. This is the fifth annual public contact report issued showing data and trends related to complaints and input received by the Commission. The Commission received 905 consumer contacts in 2014. However, 369 were petitions calling for increased crude oil conditioning which didn't fall under PSC jurisdiction. The Commission received 639 total consumer contacts in 2015, 608 in 2016, and 534 in 2017 (chart comparing last five years is attached to this news release).

"This Commission takes public input seriously," said Commissioner Randy Christmann. "It provides us with the information we need to make the best possible decisions, so we urge North Dakotans to contact us."

When a complaint is received, a PSC staff member works as a liaison between the consumer and the company to resolve the problem within the jurisdiction of the Commission. Often, the complaint is outside of the Commission's jurisdiction and needs to be referred to another agency or the caller simply needs information. These calls are recorded as "quick referrals." The Commission received 209 quick referrals in 2018.

The North Dakota Public Service Commission is a constitutionally created state agency with authority to permit, site and regulate certain business activities in the state including electric and gas utilities, telecommunications companies, power plants, electric transmission lines, pipelines, railroads, grain elevators, auctioneers, commercial weighing devices, pipeline safety and coal mine reclamation. For more information, contact the Public Service Commission at (701) 328-2400 or www.psc.nd.gov.

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Note to the Media: A summary sheet for the 2018 consumer contact report is included on the next page.

2018 Consumer Contact Report Summary
(Includes informal complaints, public input and quick referrals)

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
AML	0	2	7	3	4
Auction/Clerk	2	0	0	3	2
Grain Buyer	0	1	0	1	1
Grain Warehouse	0	5	6	2	**128
Railroad	*408	22	13	10	13
PUD-Electric	43	95	127	87	161
PUD-Electric/Gas	60	8	2	3	3
PUD-Gas	11	51	6	24	29
PUD-Pipelines	29	87	^113	35	0
PUD-Siting	6	1	4	7	4
PUD-Telecom	104	101	70	93	44
Reclamation	0	1	0	0	0
Weights & Measures	16	12	11	11	13
Pipeline Safety	1	0	0	0	0
Quick Referrals	225	253	249	255	209
Total	905	639	608	534	611

*369 railroad contacts were due to online petition regarding railroad safety (2014)

^105 public input contacts for Dakota Access Pipeline (2016)

**Approx. 120 contacts related to insolvency case that started Fall of 2018

Informal Complaints

Regulated Entities/Complaints filed	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
MDU	33	27	17	12	20
Xcel/NSP	58	51	46	31	35
Ottertail	18	15	10	13	14
CenturyLink/Qwest	72	89	60	88	33
Total	181	182	133	144	102

*Note: numbers included in above chart reflect only informal complaints;
Does not reflect public input related to cases