

STATE OF NEW YORK

Public Service Commission

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FOR RELEASE: IMMEDIATELY

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PSC PROVIDES ASSISTANCE TO UTILITY CUSTOMERS

- More Than \$7 Million Returned to Customers-

Albany, NY—04/23/08—The New York State Public Service Commission (Commission) today announced that in 2007 its staff assisted approximately 301,000 utility customers in resolving matters with utility companies about billing, service quality, and collections through its toll-free HELPLINE and Emergency Hotline.

Approximately 75,000 customers spoke directly with our Call Center staff, which provided assistance in both English and Spanish. An additional 10,000 customers contacted the Commission's staff by mail, the Internet, or by visiting one of its three offices in Albany, Buffalo and New York City for assistance. As a result of the assistance provided by Commission's Office of Consumer Services staff, customers received over \$7.0 million in bill credits and refunds.

“This Commission exercises its regulatory authority to ensure essential consumer protections and rights regarding access to safe, adequate and reliable natural gas, electric, steam, water and telecommunications service,” said Commission Chairman Garry Brown. “Ensuring consumer protection requires more than just monitoring utilities for missteps. It requires sorting through hundreds of thousands of contacts with individual customers, analyzing the problems encountered and developing solutions one customer at a time— something our Office Consumer Service performs on a daily basis. Our staff plays a critical role in working directly with New Yorkers to help them resolve issues they have with their utilities in a fair and professional manner.”

In addition to resolving matters with utilities, staff is responsible for ensuring that the customers receive the assistance and protections they are entitled to under the Home Energy Fair Practices Act (New York State statute governing the provision of natural gas, electric and steam service to residential customers). Working with the major gas and electric companies in the state, Commission staff took additional steps this past winter to assist customers, especially the state's most vulnerable residents – the elderly, blind, disabled and low income. These steps include offering renegotiated deferred payment agreements, refraining from terminating service during extremely severe winter weather, offering utility payment assistance programs, and encouraging the use of budget billing to make monthly bills more manageable.

Commission staff also works closely with the state's Office of Temporary Disability Assistance, the Consumer Protection Board and the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority to educate customers about the various ways in which they can control their energy costs, including investments in energy efficiency, accessing social service programs, budget billing, and informed choices about their energy supplies.

As it has in past years, Commission staff is reaching out to a statewide network of 3,500 consumer leaders and advocates that includes representatives of social service agencies, community organizations and local governments to assist them in providing information concerning utility-related matters impacting their constituents.

Additionally, Commission staff is working with the state's major utilities, encouraging them to use a variety of tools to educate customers on energy conservation and efficiency, and to provide advice about payment plans and financial assistance programs. Staff will continue to monitor the utilities' implementation of education plans and work with the utilities to initiate additional outreach activities, as the need arises.

As part of the Commission's outreach efforts in 2007, over 3.7 million visits were made to Commission's www.AskPSC.com Web site. Also, Commission staff interacted with tens of thousands of New Yorkers at over 130 events for the general public and distributed over 1.3 million bilingual educational materials.

Consumers interested in filing a billing or service complaint with the Commission can call the toll-free HELPLINE at 1-800-342-3377 (8:30 am – 4:00 pm, Monday – Friday). Consumers threatened with residential electric or gas shut off should call the Emergency Hotline at 1-800-342-3355 (7:30 am – 7:30 pm, Monday – Friday). Any consumer wanting to file a complaint or get information may visit the Commission's www.AskPSC.com Web site.