

Resolution of support for the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) and urging the Ohio General Assembly to preserve the mission of the OCC by restoring its authority and funding. (Commissioners)

WHEREAS, The Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) was created by the Ohio General Assembly in 1976 to represent the interests of Ohio's residential utility customers in matters related to their public utility services, including electric, natural gas, water and telephone, and in matters related to the activities of the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio; and

WHEREAS, funded solely by assessments on utilities and not by taxes, the OCC's budget does not affect the State's General Revenue Fund; and

WHEREAS, the OCC's current operating budget is approximately \$8.5 million per year; however under the proposed biennial budget, funding would be reduced to \$4.1 million per year; and

WHEREAS, the OCC staff, which includes attorneys, accountants, economists, engineers, investigators and other highly skilled professionals, participate in legal proceedings, analyze utility issues, educate customers, resolve informal complaints relating to utility services through the highly effective Consumer Call Center, and advocates on behalf of Ohio's residential households; and

WHEREAS, in the current biennium, the Ohio Consumers' Counsel has saved customers \$54.8 million directly through its advocacy, and an additional \$1.9 billion in shared savings with other partners, and furthermore, during the past 35 years the OCC has saved utility customers \$10 billion in avoided utility costs, thus the savings have far exceeded the costs; and

WHEREAS, any budget reduction to the OCC would not be returned to the taxpayers, but would go to the utility companies, and the proposed budget cuts would have a detrimental impact on the residential utility customers of the State of Ohio and the ability of the OCC to effectively advocate on their behalf; and

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WHEREAS, additional proposed amendments would further reduce the Ohio Consumers' Counsel's authority to represent the best interest of utility customers, including prohibiting the OCC from operating a call center, removing OCC contact information from bills and notices, and prohibiting it from advocating a position that conflicts with the development of competitive markets in the utility industry; NOW THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS, FRANKLIN COUNTY, OHIO;

1. That the Board of Commissioners recognizes the vital work of the OCC as a strong consumer advocate and only statutory entity representing the interests of residential utility consumers.
2. That the Board of Commissioners does hereby support the OCC and urges the Ohio General Assembly to restore full authority to the OCC, and to restore funding to the OCC's budget in order to preserve its mission.