



Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

Before The Ohio House of Representatives

Energy Committee

Testimony on House Bill 158 (The Consumer Utility Billing Transparency Act)

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On Behalf of the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

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Hello Chair Holmes, Vice-Chair Klopfenstein, Ranking Member Glassburn, and Committee members. I hope you and your colleagues are well. Thank you for this opportunity to testify as a Proponent of House Bill 158.

My name is Maureen Willis. I am the Ohio Consumers' Counsel, the Director of OCC. OCC is the state agency that has been the voice for Ohio residential utility consumers for almost fifty years. I am testifying on behalf of Ohio's 4.5 million residential utility consumers.

OCC strongly supports H.B. 158, which seeks to provide transparency in utility billing by requiring residential utility bills to itemize all commodities, riders, taxes, and other costs associated with services provided by natural gas, water works or electric light companies. All Ohioans, whether served by investor-owned utilities, municipalities, or co-ops, could benefit from full and accurate disclosure of utility charges.

I offer a brief additional comment to support one practical method for helping Ohioans understand their bills: the use of QR codes on bills. Embedding QR codes on utility bills can link customers to explanatory sources (glossaries, FAQs, interactive tools) and thus improve customer understanding and trust.¹

This legislation, introduced by Representatives Brennan and Thomas, along with a bipartisan group of cosponsors, represents a critical step forward in empowering Ohio utility consumers with the information necessary to fully understand their bills. Transparency in billing is not just a matter of clarity; it is a fundamental consumer right.

Utility bills often arrive as a single, confusing total, leaving households in the dark about what they're paying. On the opposite end of the spectrum, a utility bill may arrive with a multitude of

¹ Web links to a comprehensive glossary of terms could also be helpful.

unfamiliar line-item charges with strange names that are not explained or defined. By breaking these costs out and providing a conveniently accessible source that explains the charges, consumers will be able to understand their expenses, check for billing errors, monitor their usage and perhaps adjust their consumption habits.

Transparency in utility billing also contributes to greater accountability from utility service providers. It allows consumers to identify and question fees, raising public awareness of utility regulation and pricing. This bill doesn't just inform Ohioans; it amplifies their voice in shaping an affordable, sustainable energy future.

We recommend that utilities be required to place a QR code on residential bills linking directly to a plain-language glossary of billing terms. Many consumers struggle to understand technical line items like "distribution rider," "service charge" or "capacity charge" to name a few confusing terms. A QR code could instantly connect them to explanations provided by an independent party like the OCC.

This approach has been used successfully in other jurisdictions, including the United Kingdom² and several U.S. utilities, to improve consumer comprehension and engagement. It is a simple, low-cost way to help achieve the transparency that H.B. 158 envisions.

While I recognize the scope of this bill is already substantial, I respectfully offer an additional suggestion: consider using QR codes or web links on utility bills that direct consumers to information about assistance programs – both those offered by utilities and by state agencies. Data we've reviewed shows that only about 20% of eligible consumers are actually receiving the assistance available to them. That must change. Ensuring that consumers are informed and educated about these programs is essential.

H.B. 158 is a practical, common-sense measure for Ohio households, delivering transparency and fairness. It will contribute to informed decision making by consumers. I urge you to support it.

Thank you again to the bill sponsors, Rep. Brennan and Thomas for this pro-consumer legislation. I am happy to answer any questions.

² In 2014, the UK mandated QR codes on energy bills. UK regulator Ofgem publishes an online "Energy terms explained glossary with definitions of key billing terms. Ofgem.gov.uk