



Public Service Commission

NEWS RELEASE
Jan. 23, 2020

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PSC Receives More Than 500 Consumer Contacts in 2019

BISMARCK, ND – The North Dakota Public Service Commission (PSC) today reported that the agency received 530 consumer contacts in 2019. 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.

Informal 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 530 contacts, 105 (20%) were complaints against companies regulated by the Commission. Complaint numbers for MDU and Xcel were both down from last year, while complaints for Otter Tail Power were up due to some challenges faced early in the year after launching a new billing system. Complaints for the telecommunications company CenturyLink increased slightly from 33 in 2018 to 36 in 2019. The majority of complaints against CenturyLink continue to be related to prolonged outages or customers who experience frequent outages.

“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 2019 there were 262 public input contacts recorded or 49 percent of the total contacts. The majority of these comments were submitted for new wind energy projects and for the Dakota Access Pipeline Emmons County Pump Station case. In total there were 92 unique comments recorded for the Dakota Access Pipeline pump station case and in addition, three different petitions were received that included form letters with more than 26,000 signatures.

“Having an open and effective dialogue with those we serve is essential to good government,” said Commission Chairman Brian Kroshus. “We continuously look for ways to improve processes and procedures and most importantly, broaden 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 sixth annual public contact report issued showing data and trends related to complaints and input received by the Commission. The Commission received 639 total consumer contacts in 2015, 608 in 2016, 534 in 2017, and 611 in 2018 (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 recorded 212 quick referrals in 2019.

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 2019 consumer contact report is included on the next page.

2019 Consumer Contact Report Summary
(Includes informal complaints, public input and quick referrals)

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
AML	2	7	3	4	0
Auction/Clerk	0	0	3	2	1
Grain Buyer	1	0	1	1	1
Grain Warehouse	5	6	2	128 ²	2
Railroad	22	13	10	13	25
PUD-Electric	95	127	87	161	228
PUD-Electric/Gas	8	2	3	3	2
PUD-Gas	51	6	24	29	9
PUD-Other	0	0	0	0	1
PUD-Pipelines	87	113 ¹	35	0	94 ³
PUD-Siting	1	4	7	4	5
PUD-Telecom	101	70	93	44	37
Reclamation	1	0	0	0	0
Weights & Measures	12	11	11	13	7
Pipeline Safety	0	0	0	0	0
Quick Referrals	253	249	255	209	212
Total	639	608	534	611	530

¹105 public input contacts for Dakota Access Pipeline (2016)

²Approx. 120 contacts related to insolvency case that started Fall of 2018

³Includes 92 unique comments for Dakota Access Pumping Station case (PU-19-204)

See breakdown below for details on petition signatures received:

Dakota Access Pipeline Emmons County Pumping Station-All Public Input Entries received

Unique Comments	92
<i>Form Letter Signatures:</i>	
Lakota People's Law Project	25,647
Sierra Club	54
Standing Rock Sioux Tribe	293
Total=	26,086

Informal Complaints

Regulated Entities/Complaints filed	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
MDU	27	17	12	20	13
Xcel/NSP	51	46	31	35	18
Ottetail	15	10	13	14	38
CenturyLink/Qwest	89	60	88	33	36
Total	182	133	144	102	105

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