



Public Service Commission

NEWS RELEASE
March 3, 2021

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

PSC Receives More Than 800 Consumer Contacts in 2020

BISMARCK, ND – The North Dakota Public Service Commission (PSC) today reported that the agency received more than 800 consumer contacts in 2020. 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 utilities 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 804 contacts, 64 (8%) were informal complaints against public utility companies regulated by the Commission. Informal complaint numbers overall were lower for 2020. The most frequent reasons for complaints are billing issues, disconnects and phone outages.

“The past year was unprecedented with quarantines disrupting daily life and business for everyone in our state,” said Commission Chair Julie Fedorchak, who holds the Consumer Affairs Portfolio. “Despite that, and in fact because of that, we pursued new ways to allow people to engage with us and those new tools will continue to make it easier for the public to interact with the PSC on issues that matter to them.”

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. Due to COVID-19 restrictions throughout the year, the Commission used a variety of different methods to ensure everyone the ability to comment on projects, including accepting written comments and the ability for the public to call into hearings via telephone to provide comments. In 2020 there were 292 public input contacts recorded or 36 percent of the total contacts. The majority of these comments were submitted for new wind energy projects and rider changes on bills.

"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."

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 seventh annual public contact report issued showing data and trends related to complaints and input received by the Commission. The Commission launched a new public comment tracking system in January 2020 that allows more flexibility to record comments from the public and generate statistics and reports.

“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.”

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 “referrals.” The Commission recorded 190 referrals in 2020.

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, 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.

###

Find us on Twitter: twitter.com/ndpsc or [@NDPSC](https://twitter.com/NDPSC)

Note to the Media: A summary sheet for the 2020 consumer contact report is included on the next page.

2020 Consumer Contact Report Summary by Jurisdiction
 (Includes informal complaints, public input, information requests,
 general comments and offsite referrals)

Jurisdiction	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Auction	0	3	2	1	39
Common Pipeline Carrier	113	35	0	26,088 ¹	2
Decommissioning	0	0	0	0	0
Electric Utility	127	87	161	228	151
Gas Utility	6	24	29	9	14
Grain	10	3	9	11	14
Mining - AML	9	2	5	5	23
Mining - Reclamation	0	0	0	0	2
Safety Regulation - Railroad	14	10	13	27	25
Siting	4	7	4	5	204 ²
Telecommunications	70	93	44	37	51
Weights & Measures	11	11	14	8	89
Offsite Referral	249	255	209	212	190
Total	613	530	490	26,631	804

¹26,086 petition signatures for DAPL Emmons Co. Pump Station Project

²162 Northern Divide Wind Project-Public Input

Informal Complaints (Public Utilities)

Regulated Entity	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
CenturyLink Communications, LLC	60	88	33	36	28
Montana-Dakota Utilities Co.	17	11	19	12	16
Otter Tail Power Company	9	11	14	38	7
Xcel Energy Inc.	45	31	34	17	13
Total	131	141	100	103	64