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# Maryland Office of People's Counsel Wants to Put an End to Utilities Charging Customers for Corporate Trade Group Dues

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For years, utility consumers have been unknowingly funding corporate lobbying groups like the Edison Electric Institute and the American Gas Association.



Maryland People's Counsel  
David Lapp

Now, the Maryland Office of the People's Counsel wants it to stop.

“Under current accounting rules, customers may unknowingly and unjustifiably pay for utility trade association political efforts,” said Maryland People's Counsel David S. Lapp. “In the past, trade associations have funded efforts to deny climate change and thwart policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and customers have paid for those efforts. That has to stop.”

Maryland customers pay millions for utility trade group dues, but how trade groups use that money is hidden from scrutiny because of federal accounting rules.

These corporate lobbying groups routinely engage in political activities such as media efforts and advocacy training.

These efforts are excluded from customer rates only if the trade association reports them as a lobbying expense, but many such activities don't qualify as lobbying, Lapp said.

Lapp called on the Federal Energy Regulation Commission (FERC) to change its rules so that utilities can no longer automatically charge customers for their trade association dues.

The changes to FERC's accounting rules would make trade association dues unrecoverable unless the utility shows they benefit customers.

“We don't know what political efforts customers may be funding now through utility trade association dues,” Lapp said. “Customers should not pay dues for political advocacy or other activities that don't support their utility service.”

In March, the Center for Biological Diversity petitioned the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission today to prevent electric utilities from forcing customers to finance anti-environment trade groups.

“It's time to stop forcing people to support anti-environment trade groups that stand in the way of the urgently needed transition to clean energy,” said Howard Crystal, legal director of the Center's Energy Justice program. “Often those groups are working directly against the customers' own interests, as well as the future wellbeing of

their children. Millions of dollars are funneled from ratepayers to organizations that pose tremendous threats to the climate and clean energy development. People have a fundamental First Amendment right not to be forced to bankroll groups engaged in political activities they oppose.”



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