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**More Transparency Needed for the Millions That Customers
Pay for Utility Trade Group Dues, Office of People's Counsel
Tells Federal Agency**

BALTIMORE – Utility customers may be paying for utility trade group political advocacy, the Office of People's Counsel told federal regulators in a filing today. OPC asked the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to change its rules so that utilities can no longer automatically charge customers for their trade association dues.

“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. Trade groups include, for example, the Edison Electric Institute and the National Gas Association. Such 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.

In today's filing, OPC signaled its support for a petition asking for changes to rules that now cause customers to automatically pay for trade association dues and that prevent advocates for consumers—such as OPC—from scrutinizing trade group expenditures. 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.”

The Maryland Office of People's Counsel is an independent state agency that represents Maryland's residential consumers of electric, natural gas, telecommunications, private water and certain transportation matters before the Public Service Commission, federal regulatory agencies and the courts.

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