

OPC Water Services Division

2019-2020 Progress Report





Dear Utility Consumers,

As People's Counsel for the District of Columbia, I invite you to read the "OPC Water Services Division 2019-2020 Progress Report." April 11th marked the One Year Anniversary of the *DC Water Consumer Protection Amendment Act of 2018*, the law that went into effect on April 11, 2019, making the Office of the People's Counsel the advocate for DC Water consumers.

I welcome the opportunity to share with you the progress our Water Services Division (WSD) has made in its first year of serving water consumers who have quickly come to rely on WSD staff to resolve their concerns and complaints. We have very ably assisted consumers facing disconnection of service, high bills, water leaks and faulty meters, among other issues. We also successfully advocated for consumers at DC Water proceedings that impact all water ratepayers. I am thrilled with the on-the-ground work my staff has accomplished to ensure District residents in all eight wards have clean, affordable, and reliable water services. That mandate is especially relevant now as we present this brochure in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic.

Forty-five years ago, OPC was created as an independent agency of the District of Columbia government, with a mission to advocate, educate, and protect consumers of electric, natural gas, and local telephone services. This period established our mantra: *OPC is Your Utility Lawyer*. Now, with the inclusion of water consumers and the challenges of the times, I have never been prouder to say: *OPC is Your Water Utility Lawyer*. I look forward to continuing to serve DC Water consumers at the highest possible level.

Thank you for reviewing our "OPC Water Services Division 2019-2020 Progress Report."

Sandra Mattavous-Frye

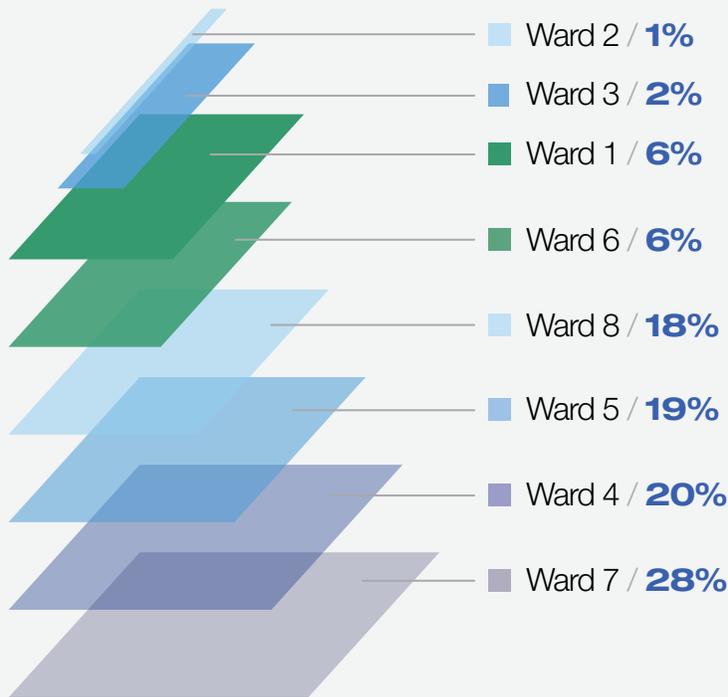
People's Counsel

OPC Water Services Division Year One Accomplishments

Comprehensive Complaint Investigation, Negotiation and Resolution

- Addressed more than 450 consumer complaints about high DC Water bills, disconnections and payment disputes
- Advocated for consumers in all 8 Wards
- Negotiated more than \$45,000 in bill credits and adjustments, including late fees and penalties waived

Complaints By Ward



Savings for DC Water Consumers

\$4,017 +

Bill adjustment after a faulty water meter was detected at the home of a 92-year-old Ward 7 resident

\$4,904 +

Bill adjustment after a pipe leak was identified on public space, not on the property of a Ward 5 resident, and repaired by DC Water

\$7,974 +

Bill adjustment for a Ward 3 multi-unit property owner to credit over-estimated charges

\$8,520 +

Bill adjustment due to a pipe leak that was later repaired at the home of an 82-year-old Ward 5 resident

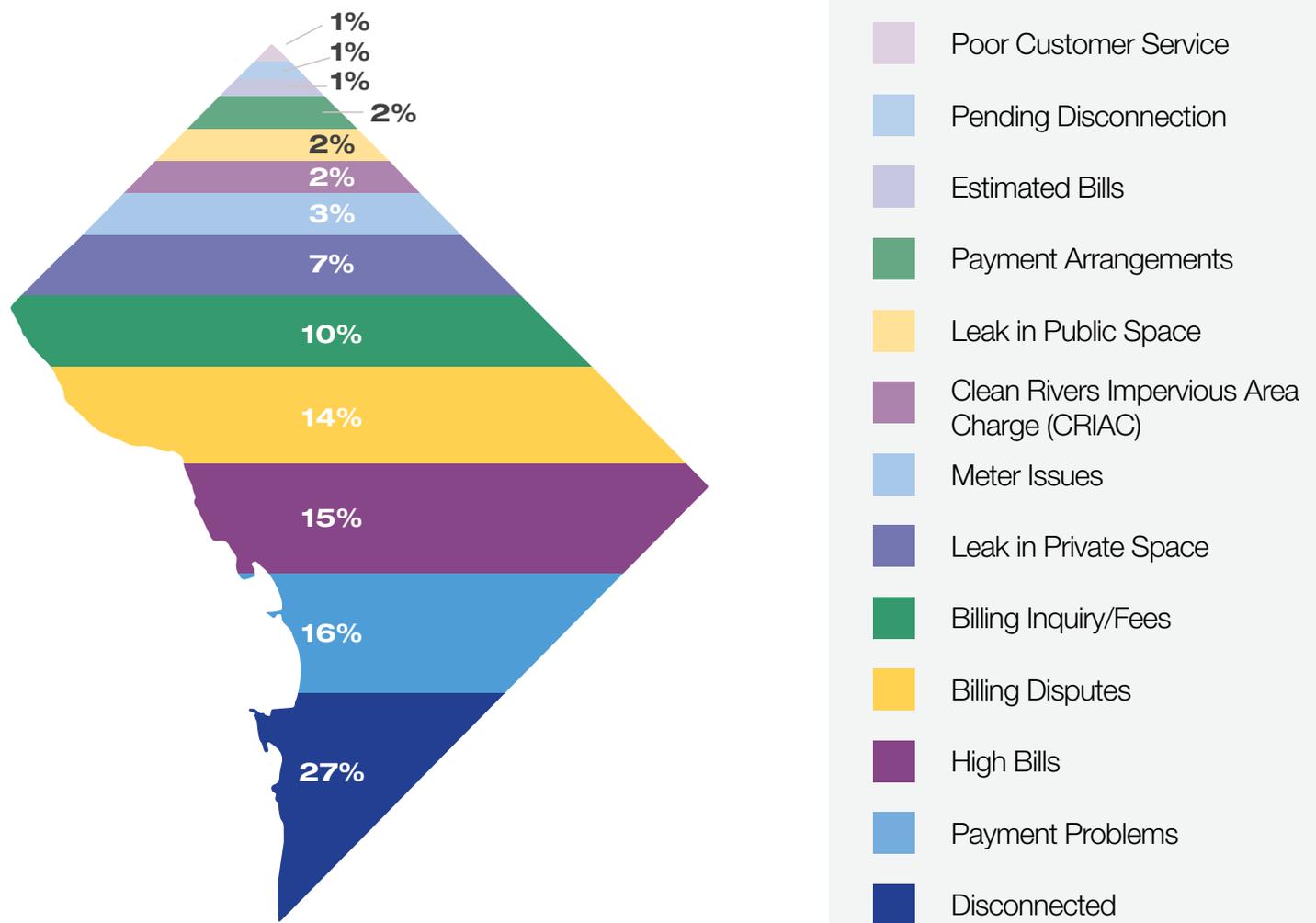


Community Outreach Specialist Marchim Williams (left) shows OPC's numerous educational handouts at a downtown street fair.

Consumer Education and Community Outreach

- Organized or participated in more than 50 outreach events, engaging consumers and representatives of community organizations, nonprofits, faith-based institutions, D.C. government agencies and private entities
- Raised awareness about OPC services for DC Water consumers and educated the public through Metro train and bus “OPC Can Help” posters, radio announcements, podcast programs, informational palm cards, brochures with water conservation tips, children’s coloring books, and branded household items
- Participated as a key member of the working group that developed the Water Consumer Bill of Rights
- Created a simple guide to inform consumers of their rights and posted entire Water Consumer Bill of Rights on OPC website: opc-dc.gov

Complaints By Type



Legal, Administrative and Legislative Victories Benefitting DC Water Consumers

- Successful advocacy in the DC Water rulemaking to decrease Clean Rivers Impervious Area Charge (CRIAC) and increase sewer rates by filing 3 sets of detailed comments and presenting oral testimony at the CRIAC public hearing. Consistent with OPC's assertion that DC Water had failed to provide the detail required by law to support its proposed changes, DC Water has created website materials for public review and increased transparency.
- Provided critical written comments in the DC Water rulemaking and public hearing testimony resulting in a victory for consumers as DC Water extends the Customer Assistance Program II (CAP2) through fiscal year 2020; and proposes to make CAP2 permanent for fiscal year 2021.

Prior to talking with OPC, I thought I was helpless in questioning my excessive water bills. OPC made time to meet with me on the same day I called to ask for help. I met with OPC's Community Outreach Specialist, Rusheeda Boyd. I immediately felt like I had an advocate for me as a consumer. She was upfront with me about the time it would take, the process, and most importantly that we would work on this together with OPC's legal counsel and present our case to a Hearing Officer if necessary. Everyone at OPC was wonderful! It was a pleasure and delight to know they were there. They let me know that I wasn't in this alone anymore.

— Laura Gross,
Ward 2 property owner

Ward 2 property owner Laura Gross with WSD Manager Chandler Crumlin following a DC Council hearing where she praised WSD for winning her billing dispute against DC Water.



Assistant People's Counsel Grace Soderberg outlines WSD services at a meeting of the DC Environmental Network



Legal, Administrative and Legislative Victories Benefitting DC Water Consumers

- Successfully represented consumers in DC Water formal administrative hearings, including a final victory when a hearing officer ruled in the customer's favor following DC Water's request for a rehearing.
- Worked with DC Council to create emergency legislation to allow low-income DC Water residential customers who have outstanding water bill balances to apply for financial assistance from the CRIAC Assistance Fund.
- Oversight of the monthly meetings of the DC Water Committees and the monthly DC Water Board of Directors' meetings.
- Leadership as an officer (Secretary) on the National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates (NASUCA) Water Committee to help facilitate and implement policy on a national level.

Only through a blessing from God was I able to contact OPC where Marchim Williams assisted us in reconnecting our service and arrange an affordable payment plan. It reduced my anxiety. I am thankful that the threatening calls and letters have stopped.

— Jeanette Jones,
Ward 4 resident



Mayor Muriel Bowser visits the Water Services Division offices at OPC.

Hear From Our Constituents



I'm a 94-year-old World War II veteran. When I called the People's Counsel, I had been without water for just over 2 weeks. When you grow old like me, there's only so much you can do...It was psychologically damaging to be without the basics of life such as water and heat. Bottom line is that Valca Valentine and Linda Jefferson helped make me whole. Once they explained the situation to DC Water, they teamed up and came up with a solution... they helped me get this bill down. People like me need help. We're not trying to beat the system. We just need a hand.

— Dr. Horatio Harris, Ward 5 resident

Community Outreach Specialist Valca Valentine listens to a senior at the Adas-Behrend Senior Fellowship in Ward 3.

We were surprised to receive an estimated water/sewer bill for approximately 5 times the recent and historical consumption amount. Although we strongly felt the charges were erroneous it seemed prudent to pay. After speaking with the Office of People's Counsel representative, we decided to further dispute the charges. If it were not for the efforts of the OPC in getting the incorrectly applied charges removed from our account, we would have been forced to pay thousands of dollars for water/sewer usage that was not metered or calculated in a fashion that could be plausibly explained.

— Michael Brown, Ward 3 property owner



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