



Public Service Commission Chairman Lane's Column



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What Is the Public Service Commission and What Does It Do?

By Chairman Charlotte R. Lane, Public Service Commission

All West Virginians should have the opportunity to understand how your government works, including the responsibilities and activities of state agencies. To that end, I am beginning a regular newspaper column, dedicated to explaining the functions of the Commission and keeping you informed of our activities and rulings.

The Public Service Commission of West Virginia was created by the State Legislature in 1913, and regulates only those things the Legislature directs us to regulate. During its early years, the Commission's primary work centered on the regulation of railroads, telephone, gas and electric utility companies. Later the Commission was given jurisdiction over motor carriers transporting goods and passengers over the state's highways. High energy prices and inflation in the 1970s greatly increased the utility rate case activity at the Commission. In 1979, the Legislature created the Consumer Advocate Division (CAD) to intervene in major cases on behalf of residential ratepayers. The CAD is financially and administratively independent of the Commission.

Today, the Commission is supported by a staff of approximately 220 employees, including attorneys, judges, engineers, economists, accountants and law enforcement officers. The Commission regulates electric and natural gas utilities, landline services of telephone utilities, and private and publicly owned water and sewer utilities (with limited jurisdiction over the rates of larger municipal and public service district systems). The Commission also regulates the intrastate transmission of gas and hazardous liquids, regulated gathering and gas distribution pipelines. Our Transportation Enforcement Officers impose safety, weight and speed limit enforcement on commercial motor vehicles. They also monitor the transportation of hazardous materials, including the identification, registration and permitting of commercial motor vehicles transporting such materials. We also oversee the Coal Resource Transportation System, taxis, limousines, tour buses, third-party vehicle towing services and enforcement of federal and state railroad safety regulations.

The Commission touches your life every day. We work hard to protect the safety, interests and rights of West Virginia consumers like you. In future columns, I will explain in greater detail how we strive to make your life better and safer, while balancing the interests of the state's economy, the utility companies and you, the utility customers.

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