

PA Public Utility Commission

The PUC's Bureau of Consumer Services:

Handling Informal Utility-Related Complaints from Across the Commonwealth

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2026 PAPUC Safety Conference
September 9-10, 2026



Agenda



The BCS at the PUC

+ Informal vs Formal Complaints

Handling Informal Complaints

BCS Policy Functions:

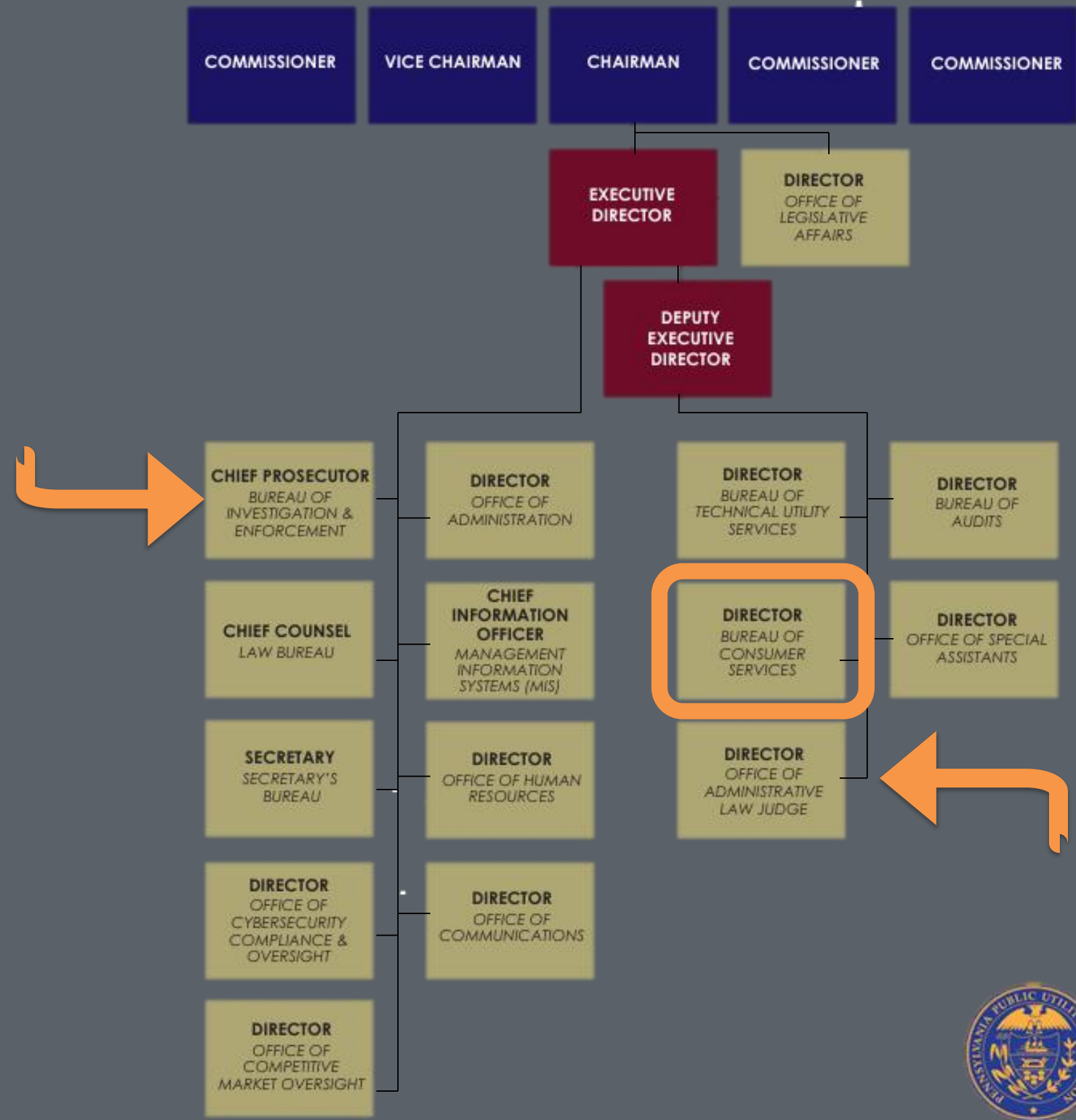
Case & Compliance Reviews

Data & Reporting

Assistance for Low-Income &

Payment-Troubled Customers

PUC Organizational Chart



+ The BCS makes up about **20%** of the PUC's staff complement!



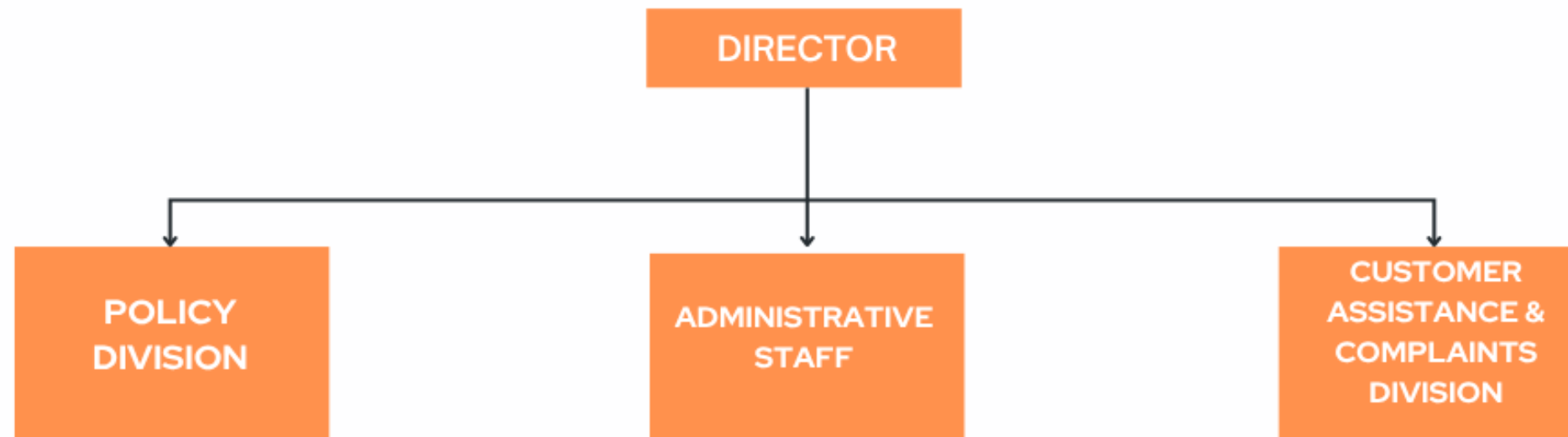
BCS Statutory Responsibilities

Title 66 Pa. C.S. Section 308.
Bureaus and offices (BCS)

The Bureau of Consumer Services shall:

- **investigate** and issue final determinations on all informal consumer complaints and
- shall advise the commission as to the need for formal commission action on any matters brought to its attention by complaints.
 - Any party may appeal a final determination issued by the Bureau of Consumer Services and seek review by an administrative law judge or
 - special agent subject to the procedures in section 335 (relating to initial decisions).
- shall on behalf of the commission **keep records of all complaints received**, the matter complained of, the utility involved, and the disposition thereof and
- shall **at least annually report** to the commission on such matters.
 - The commission may take official notice of all complaints and the nature thereof in any proceeding before the commission in which the utility is a party
 - The commission shall adopt, publish and generally make available rules by which a consumer may make informal complaints.
- The bureau shall also assist and advise the commission on matters of **safety compliance** by public utilities.

BCS ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



Policy Division

- Monitors and evaluates the customer service practices and programs of utilities
- Works to ensure that utilities comply with customer service regulations. May serve as prosecutorial staff on formal cases.
- Tracks trends in the number and type of consumer complaints, payment arrangement requests, utility termination activity, collection of delinquent accounts, compliance with customer service regulations and other areas critical to evaluating utility customer service performance.

Administrative staff

- Clerical and administrative support
- Mail processing



Customer Assistance & Complaints Division

- Handling informal consumer complaints, payment arrangement requests, and inquiries involving electric, natural gas, telephone, steam heat, water and sewage companies.
- Investigators arbitrate billing, credit and miscellaneous problems and issue binding decisions to resolve informal disputes

Formal vs. Informal Complaints

Formal Complaints

- + Presided over by an Administrative Law Judge
- + Legal proceedings
- + Companies must be represented by an attorney
- + Posted to PUC website
- + Available for public inspection

Informal Complaints

- + Handled by a BCS Investigator
- + Companies often represented by compliance representatives
- + Confidential and not available for public inspection
- + Shorter, less complicated process
- + Faster resolution
- + Decisions can be appealed and become formal complaints

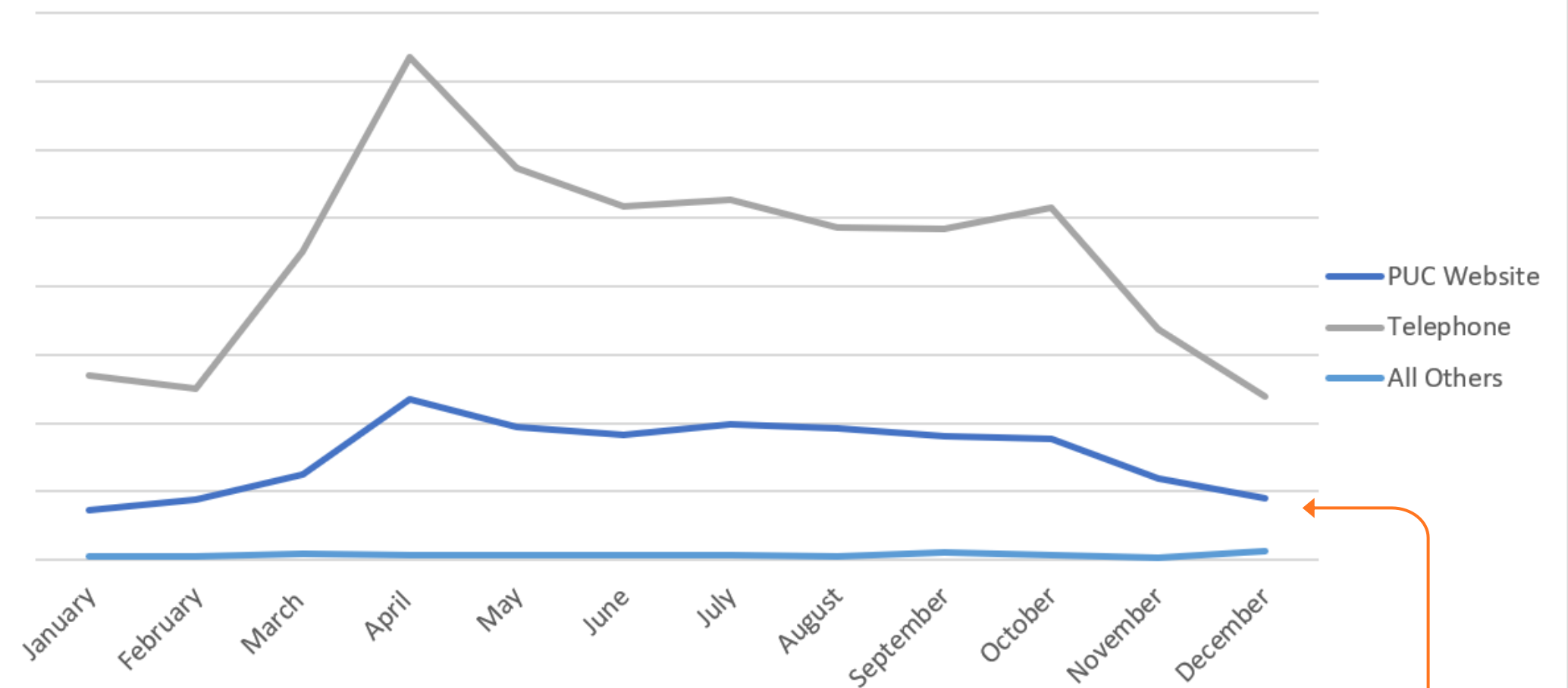
How does the BCS Receive Informal Complaints?

Majority of complaints come via **phone** (~70-75%)

+ Other Options Include:

- Website Form
- Governmental Referral
- Letter
- Visit

Source for Cases and Inquiries Opened by Month in 2025



+ The Informal Complaint Form on the **PUC Website** is the second most common method used to file an informal complaint.

How Do Customers Know to Contact Us?

- + Utility Referral
- + Bill Notice
- + News Stories
- + Social Media Presence
 - Facebook
 - Twitter
 - Instagram
- + In-Person Presence
 - PA Farm Show
 - Public Input Hearings

CONTACT US

For emergencies or to report service disruptions 24/7, call 888-299-8972

 Veolia Water Pennsylvania Customer Service Center 8189 Adams Drive Hummelstown, PA 17036	 Self-Service options available 24/7 (i.e.: billing, payment) Customer Service Inquiries 888-299-8972 Fax 717-920-6066 Mon - Fri (except holidays) 8:00 am - 4:30 pm
 mywater.veolia.us	 cspa@veolia.com
 Veolia Water Pennsylvania	 @VeoliaWaterPA

Please register any question or complaint about the bill prior to the due date.
Always remember to include your account number on any correspondence to us.

Veolia Water is regulated by the Pennsylvania PUC. Customers can contact the Bureau of Consumer Services at:
P.O. Box 3265, Harrisburg, PA 17105-3265. 800 692 7380 / www.puc.state.pa.us



Inquiries

Contacts resolved during the first contact or call-back and do not require further investigation.

Consumer Complaints

Disputes related to utility billing, service delivery and repairs, etc.

Payment Arrangement Requests (PAR)

The primary request is to establish payment terms on utility bill arrearages.

Classification of Contacts



Informal Complaint Process



Complainant must contact the company first.



Company must investigate the dispute and respond within 30 days.



Company must advise the complainant of their right to contact the PUC if they aren't satisfied with the outcome of their investigation.



Complainant contacts the BCS who then notifies the company of the complaint.



Company issues its report to the BCS.



The BCS investigates and makes a determination/issues a decision.



Case Handling

Some case types are handled slightly differently based on the nature of the complaint.

- + **Service off complaints**

Shorter response timeframe required from company (5 business days)

- + **Safety cases**

Handled as high priority with instant notifications distributed to BCS and BIE Safety staff

- + **Whistleblower complaints**

Tracked separately and referred to BCS management staff for proper handling



+ 66 Pa. CS §1501 Character of service and facilities

Every public utility shall furnish and maintain **adequate, efficient, safe, and reasonable service and facilities**, and shall make all such repairs, changes, alterations, substitutions, extensions, and improvements in or to such service and facilities as shall be necessary or proper for the accommodation, convenience, and safety of its patrons, employees, and the public. Such service also shall be **reasonably continuous** and **without unreasonable interruptions or delay**. Such service and facilities shall be in conformity with the regulations and orders of the commission. Subject to the provisions of this part and the regulations or orders of the commission, every public utility may have reasonable rules and regulations governing the conditions under which it shall be required to render service. Any public utility service being furnished or rendered by a municipal corporation beyond its corporate limits shall be subject to regulation and control by the commission as to service and extensions, with the same force and in like manner as if such service were rendered by a public utility. The commission shall have sole and exclusive jurisdiction to promulgate rules and regulations for the allocation of natural or artificial gas supply by a public utility.



Complaints identified as safety-related include issues such as:

Gas:

- Gas smell within a residence
- Gas smell outside
- Hear a gas leak
- Reported a gas leak to company and company has not responded

Electric:

- Live wire on ground
- Live wire hanging off tree, fence, etc.
- Sparks from appliances, transformer, meter box, etc.
- Utility pole deteriorating or leaning towards house, street, etc.

Water:

- Flooding inside, outside, or adjacent to the house

There is normally a built-in lag time for transmitting case details to the company. Staff will call a company representative regarding safety complaints so that there is no delay in dispatching a crew to the location.

Safety Complaints

Unauthorized Use

- + Unreasonable **interference or diversion** of service, including meter **tampering** (any act which affects the proper registration of service through a meter), **by-passing** unmetered service that flows through a device connected between a service line and customer-owned facilities and unauthorized service restoration.

§52 Pa. Code 56.2
§52 Pa. Code 56.98

A public utility may **immediately terminate** service for any of the following actions by the customer:

- Unauthorized use** of the service delivered on or about the affected dwelling.
- Fraud** or material **misrepresentation** of the customer's identity for the purpose of obtaining service.
- Tampering** with meters or other public utility equipment.
- Violating** tariff provisions on file with the Commission which endanger the **safety** of a person or the integrity of the public utility's delivery system.



Written Decisions



The BCS does not issue written informal decisions in response to every informal complaint filed with the Commission. Instead, the BCS limits the issuance of written informal decisions to complaints involving subjects covered by specific regulations that authorize the BCS to issue such decisions.

The two regulations that authorize the BCS to issue written decisions are:

- + Chapter 56, §56.163 for certain matters relating to residential electric, gas and water service
- + Chapter 64, §64.153 for certain residential telephone service matters

These two chapters of regulations not only limit BCS to issuing informal binding decisions on **residential** service accounts, they also limit BCS to **certain subject matter**.

The subject matter for which BCS is authorized to issue decisions include:

- + Residential billing and payment issues,
- + Credit and deposit practices,
- + Initiation or discontinuance of service,
- + Complaint procedures, and
- + Termination/reconnection.

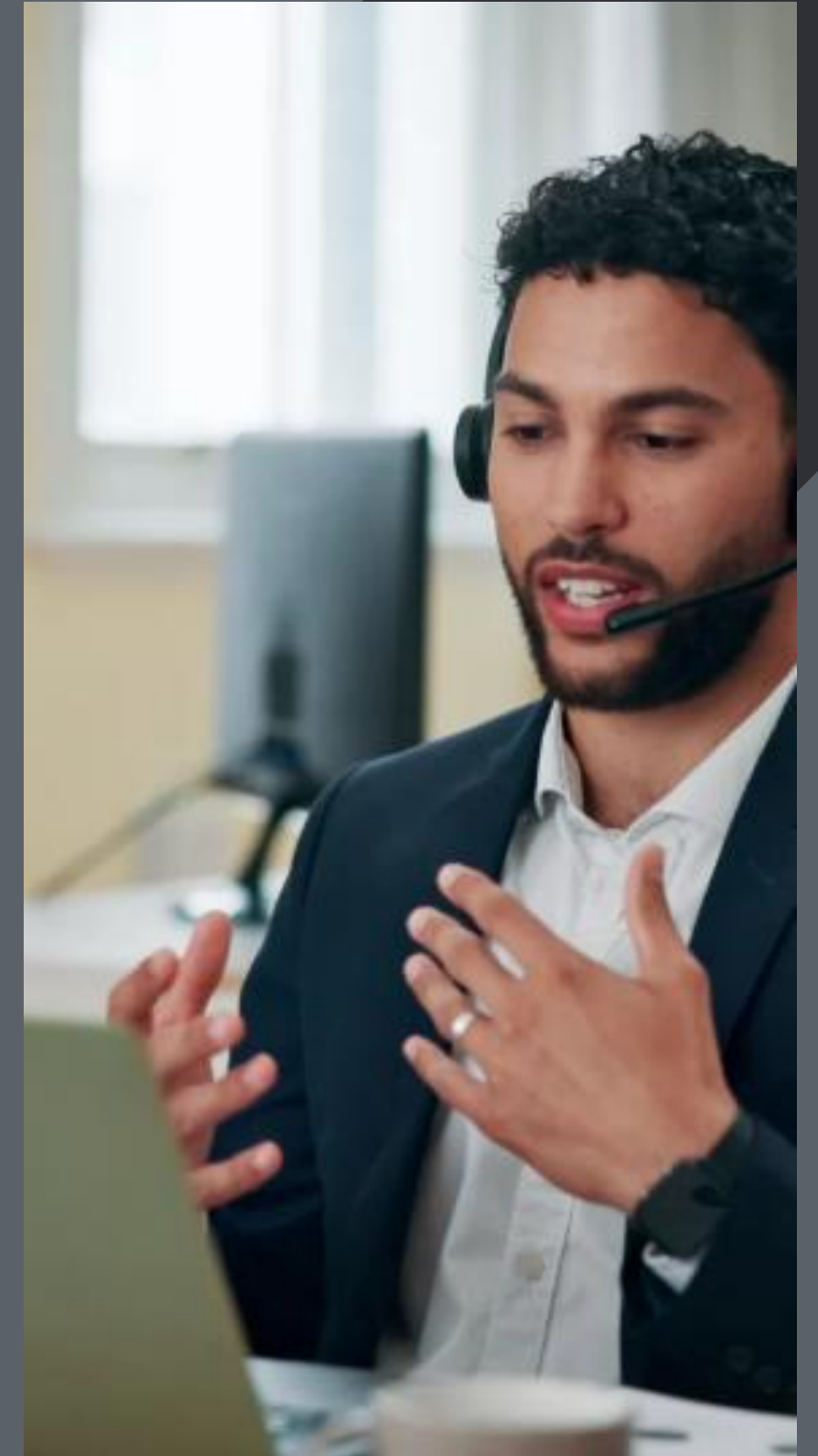
Case Closings Without a Binding Decision

The BCS' authority to render binding decisions is **limited**, in large part, because of the **complexity** often inherent in some of the matters that come before the Commission, and because of the **costs** associated with resolving certain types of problems.

For some residential matters such as:

- + line extensions,
- + water and gas pressure,
- + water quality, or
- + repeated and/or weather-related service outages,

numerous tariff rules or safety codes may come into play, and the resolution may involve expenditures of large amounts of money.



Policy Case Reviews

BCS Policy Analysts:

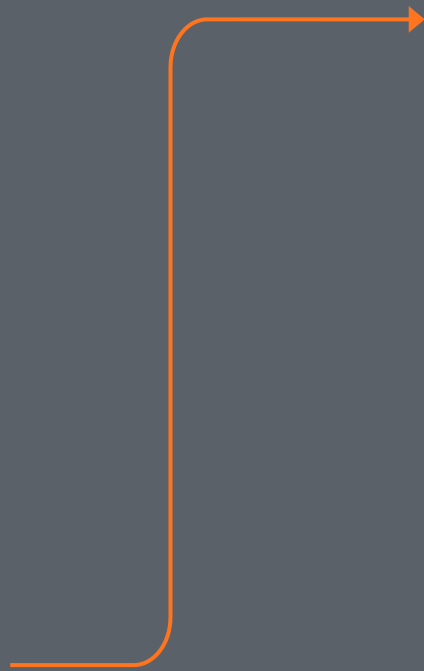
Review complaint handling for internal quality control purposes.

- + Compliance with procedures and training
- + Ability to resolve disputes
- + Understanding of and ability to apply regulations, statutes, and Orders
- + Ability to communicate clearly and effectively

Review case records to monitor company practices and note informal infractions.

- + An informal infraction occurs when a utility violates or fails to abide by a statute, Commission Order, regulation, report, Secretarial Letter, or their own tariff.
- + Cases that are evaluated, unchallenged infractions, and infractions that are upheld as verified become part of the data that is presented in the annual reporting.

Published Data & Reports



Utility Consumer Activities
Report & Evaluation
(UCARE)

Others include:

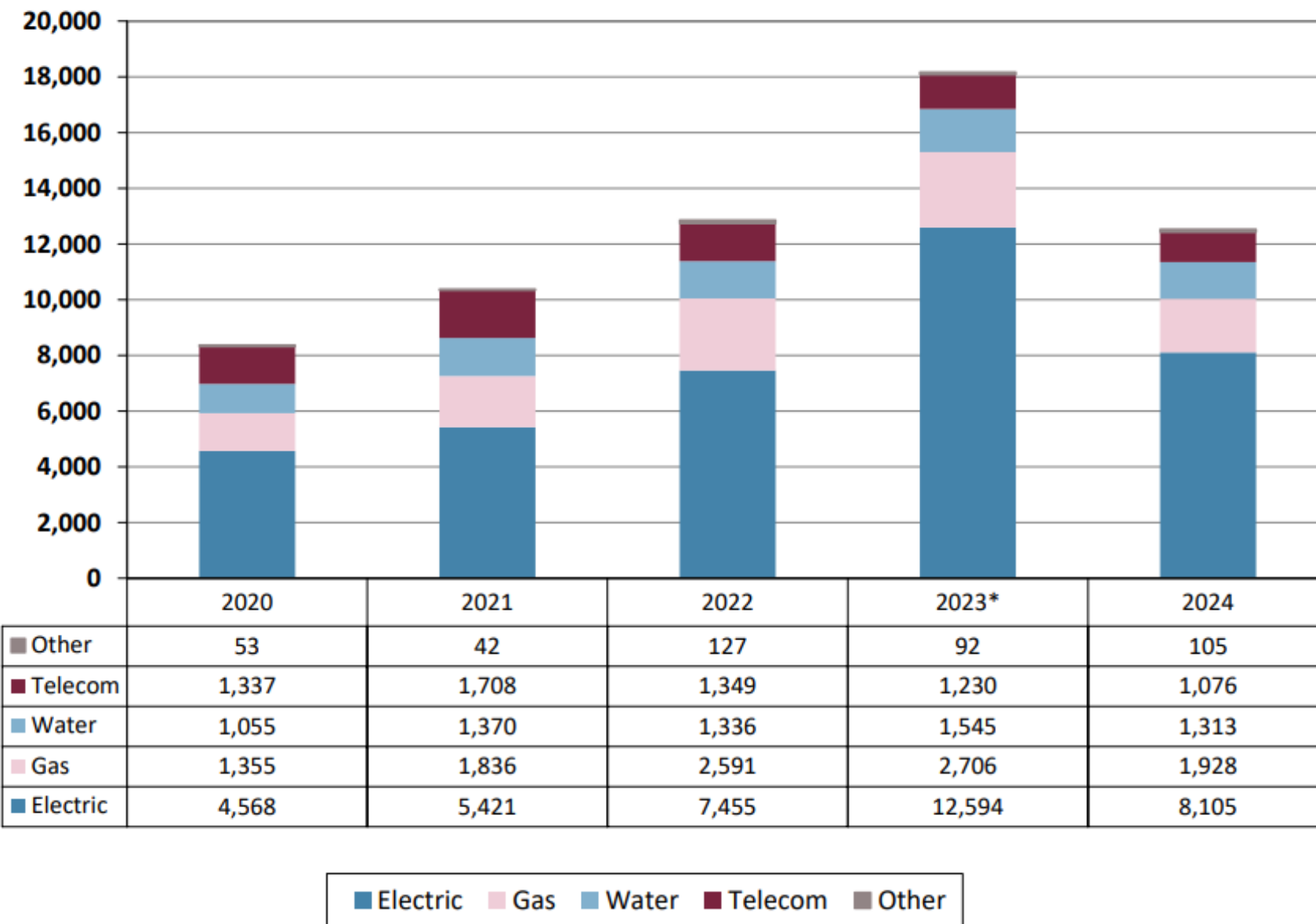
- Customer Service Performance Report
- Universal Services Programs & Collections Performance Report
- Residential Collections Data
- Cold Weather Survey Results

2024 Total Volume of Consumer Complaints and PARs to BCS

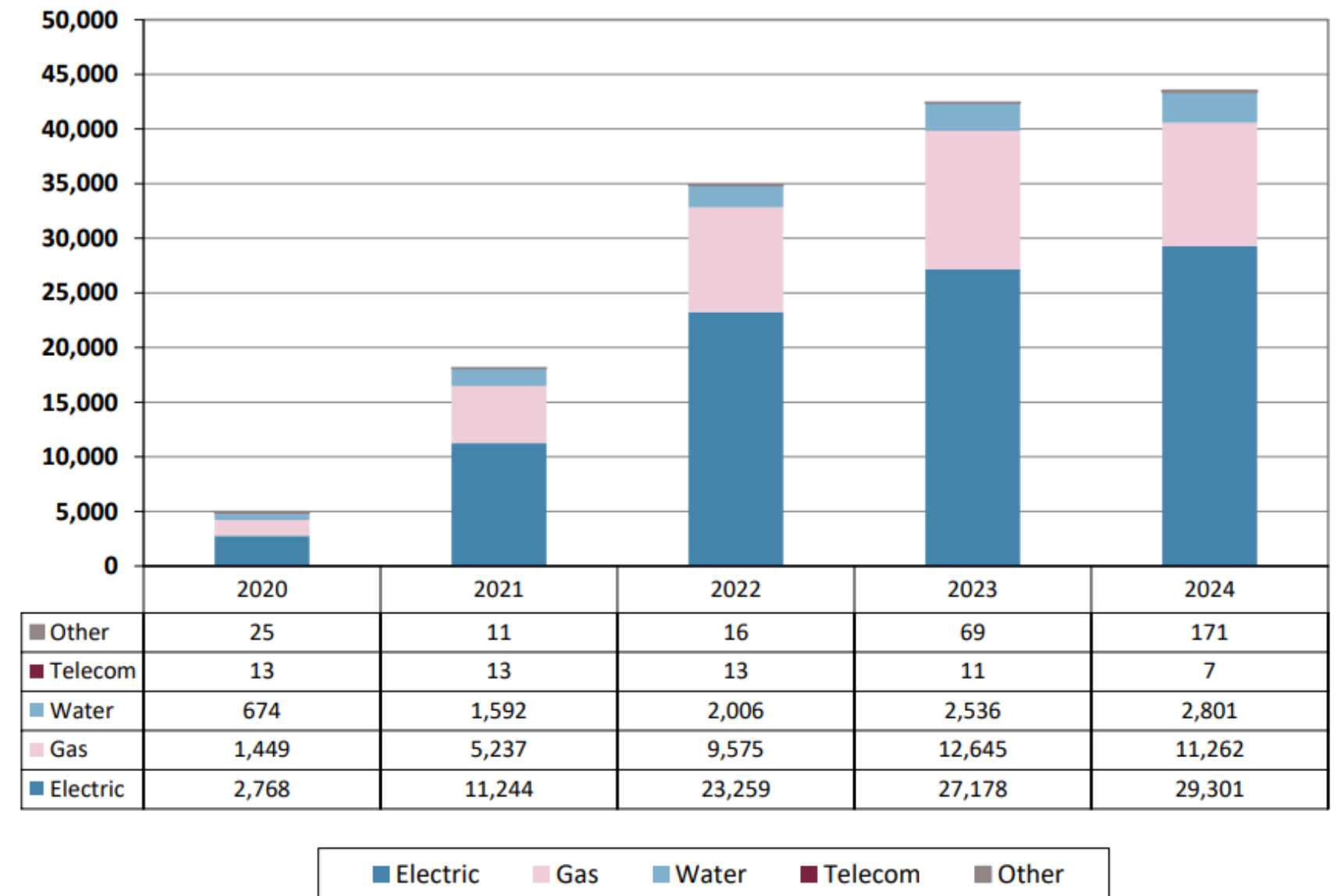
Industry*	Consumer Complaints		Payment Arrangement Requests	
	Residential	Commercial	Residential	Commercial
Electric	7,467	638	28,945	356
Gas	1,795	133	11,000	262
Water	1,205	108	2,758	43
Telecommunications	942	134	6	1
Other	100	5	169	2
Total	11,509	1,018	42,878	664

From 2024 UCARE

2020-24 Consumer Complaints by Industry



2020-24 PARs by Industry



In 2024:

- Payment Arrangement Requests accounted for ~ 78% of informal investigated complaints.
- The Electric industry accounted for ~67% of all informal investigated complaints.

From 2024 UCARE





Increased contacts in the spring and summer.

Winter Moratorium – protects consumers from heat-related utility termination between December 1 and March 31 that meet certain income requirements.

Service can be terminated for:

- + Failure to be a responsible utility customer.
- + Household income outside the utility company's income qualifying guidelines

But the utility company will give the opportunity to make payment arrangements to avoid termination.

BCS Trends

Cold Weather Survey

52 Pa. Code §56.10

Regulatory required two-part survey to gauge status of heat-related accounts **terminated within the past year** in an attempt to communicate and coordinate restoration terms.

“...attempt to make post-termination personal contact with the occupant or a responsible adult at the premises and in good faith attempt to reach an agreement regarding payment of any arrearages and restoration of service.” *52 Pa. Code § 56.100*

Initial Survey – completed within 90 days of December 1

Final Survey – completed prior to February 1 to review the status of the accounts identified on the Initial Survey



Cold Weather Survey Data

Collected and published to the PUC website at a utility-specific level

+ Based on number of residential premises surveyed

Categorized as follows:

- + Vacant premises, service still off
- + Contact was made and service restored
- + Unauthorized use discovered, service is on
- + No contact made, premises appears to be occupied, and service remains off
- + Contact made, premises appears to be occupied, and service remains off
 - Alternative Heating source being used



As of February 1, 2026,

- 50% of heating accounts that had been terminated had been reconnected with a payment arrangement, settlement agreement, or other reasons.
- ~ 25% of premises were identified as being vacant

Programs intended to help low-income households or residents undergoing hardship maintain utility service

Universal Services

Customer Assistance Programs (CAP) –helps lower monthly utility bill, and may also reduce or remove the arrearages

Hardship Funds– provide grants to pay utility bills for customers who “fall through the cracks” of other assistance programs

Customer Assistance Referral and Evaluation Program (CARES) – referral services to community organizations and governmental agencies that can provide additional resources or referrals

LIHEAP – Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program

Low Income Usage Reduction Program (LIURP) – aims reduce the amount of energy used through measures installed in the premises



For Additional Information:

- + Consumer Activities Report & Evaluation | PA PUC (UCARE)
- + Other Published Reports
- + Protections for Responsible Utility Customers



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**PAPUC Bureau of
Consumer Services**

1-800-692-7380

[Informal Complaint Form](#)