



Senate Bill No. 336

Public Act No. 24-98

AN ACT CONCERNING THE METROPOLITAN DISTRICT OF HARTFORD COUNTY'S INDEPENDENT CONSUMER ADVOCATE.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

Section 1. Section 7-334a of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2024*):

(a) There is established an Independent Consumer Advocate to act as an independent advocate for consumer interests in all matters which may affect Metropolitan District of Hartford County consumers, including, but not limited to, rates, water quality, water supply and wastewater service quality. Costs related to the Independent Consumer Advocate, including, but not limited to, hourly fees and necessary expenses shall be paid for by the district. The annual amount of such costs shall not exceed seventy thousand dollars [for the first year and fifty thousand dollars for each year thereafter,] unless there is a demonstration of substantial need made by the Independent Consumer Advocate and approved by the board of directors of the district.

(b) The Independent Consumer Advocate may appear and participate in Metropolitan District of Hartford matters or any other federal or state regulatory or judicial proceeding in which consumers of the district are or may be involved. The Independent Consumer

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Advocate, in carrying out his or her duties, shall [:(1) Have] (1) have access to the records of the district, (2) have the right to make a reasonable number of copies of district records, (3) be entitled to call upon the assistance of the district's technical and legal experts, and (4) have the benefit of all other information of the district, except for employment records and other internal documents that are not relevant to the duties of the Independent Consumer Advocate.

(c) [(1)] The Independent Consumer Advocate shall be a member of the bar of this state and shall have [private] legal experience in municipal, environmental or public utility law and policy but shall not be a member of the district's board of directors or a person who has or may have conflicts of interest, as defined by the Rules of Professional Conduct, in representing the district's consumers as a class. [(2) Prior to November 1, 2017, and prior to November first in each odd-numbered year thereafter, the Consumer Counsel, appointed pursuant to section 16-2a,] The Consumer Counsel shall select the Independent Consumer Advocate to serve for a two-year term commencing on the [following] first day of January in each odd-numbered year, except that the length of any term and the dates of commencement and expiration of any term may be altered at the discretion of the Consumer Counsel in the event of a vacancy or in the best interests of the district's consumers. The Independent Consumer Advocate may be terminated by the Consumer Counsel prior to the completion of a two-year term only for misconduct, material neglect of duty or incompetence. [(3)] The Independent Consumer Advocate shall be independent of the district's board of directors and may not be removed by the district's board of directors for any reason. The district's board of directors shall not direct or oversee the activities of the Independent Consumer Advocate. The district's board of directors shall cooperate with reasonable requests of the Independent Consumer Advocate to enable the Independent Consumer Advocate to effectively perform his or her duties and functions.

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(d) [(1)] The Independent Consumer Advocate shall prepare reports of his or her activities and submit such reports at the end of each calendar quarter to the district, the chief elected official of each [town] municipality receiving service from the district and to the Consumer Counsel. Such quarterly reports shall be posted on the Internet web sites of the district and the Consumer Counsel. [(2)] The Independent Consumer Advocate shall hold an annual public forum on the second Wednesday of October each year at a location where the district holds hearings, for the purpose of describing the recent activities of the Independent Consumer Advocate and receiving feedback from consumers. The district shall publicize the public forum through an announcement at the preceding scheduled meeting of the district, on its Internet web site and in a notice on or attached to its consumer bills. The Independent Consumer Advocate may hold additional public forums as he or she deems necessary.

(e) Nothing in this section shall be construed to prevent any interested person, including, but not limited to, any individual consumer or group of consumers, from participating in any Metropolitan District of Hartford meeting or hearing on [their own] such person's behalf or through counsel.

(f) The Metropolitan District of Hartford shall promptly adopt any changes to its rules, regulations or other governing documents necessary to carry out the requirements of this section.