AN ACT to:

(1) require the Office of Consumer Protection to [[represent]] advocate for the County’s interest in obtaining the lowest possible rates consistent with environmental stewardship for gas, electricity, and other energy sources by participating in matters pending before appropriate federal and state agencies; and

(2) generally amend County law governing energy and the environment.

By amending
Montgomery County Code
Chapter 11, Consumer Protection
Section 11-2

Boldface
Underlining
[Single boldface brackets]
Double underlining
[[Double boldface brackets]]

Heading or defined term.
Added to existing law by original bill.
Deleted from existing law by original bill.
Added by amendment.
Deleted from existing law or the bill by amendment.
Existing law unaffected by bill.

The County Council for Montgomery County, Maryland approves the following Act:
Sec. 1. Section 11-2 is amended as follows:


(a) Established. The Office of Consumer Protection is a department of County government.

(b) Authority. The Office may:

[(a)] (1) receive and investigate complaints and initiate its own investigation of deceptive, unfair, or unconscionable trade practices against consumers, hold hearings, compel the attendance of witnesses, administer oaths, take the testimony of any person under oath and require the production of any evidence relating to any matter under investigation or in question by the Office;

[(b)] (2) issue summonses and subpoenas to compel the attendance of witnesses and the production of documents, papers, books, records, and other evidence in any matter to which this Chapter applies;

[(c)] (3) issue cease and desist orders and bring enforcement actions regarding any trade practice that violates this Chapter;

[(d)] (4) report to any appropriate government agency with jurisdiction over real estate transactions or consumer protection matters any information concerning violation of any consumer protection law;

[(e)] (5) communicate the interests of consumers and merchants before administrative and regulatory agencies and legislative bodies to ensure that both are adequately represented;
[f] (6) assist, advise, and cooperate with the Better Business Bureau and local, state, and federal agencies and officials to protect and promote the interests of County consumers;

[g] (7) assist, develop, and conduct programs of consumer education and information through public hearings, meetings, publications, or other materials prepared for distribution to County consumers;

[h] (8) encourage local business and industry to maintain high standards of honesty, fair business practices, and public responsibility in the production, promotion, and sale of consumer goods or services;

[i] (9) protect and promote the welfare of County consumers and merchants;

[j] (10) report annually on the number, nature, and disposition of complaints filed with the Office. The annual report must include any recommendations made by the Advisory Committee on Consumer Protection;

[k] (11) adopt regulations under method (2) to implement this Chapter;

[l] (12) operate a voluntary arbitration program; [and]

[m] (13) enforce laws pertaining to motor vehicle repair, electrical appliances, secondhand personal property, and any other law that the Office is assigned to enforce[.]; and

[n] (14) To undertake undertake activities and establish procedures to identify, and assist consumers with respect to, any discriminatory, predatory, or abusive lending practices.

(c) *Energy and environmental advocacy.*
(1) The Office, after consulting appropriate County departments, must [] advocate for the County's interest in obtaining the lowest possible rates consistent with environmental stewardship, including the County's climate change objectives, for gas, electricity, and other energy sources by participating in matters pending before appropriate federal and state agencies, including intervening and filing comments in those matters.

(2) The Office may employ consultants and technical advisors as necessary to implement this subsection in accordance with funds appropriated in the County budget.

(3) By September 1 of each year, the Office must report to the County Executive and County Council on the actions that the Office has taken in the preceding fiscal year to implement this subsection.

Approved:

Michael J. Knapp, President, County Council

Isiah Leggett, County Executive

This is a correct copy of Council action.

Linda M. Lauer, Clerk of the Council