

July 30, 2018

c/o Tony Wilkensen
CITIZEN SELECTION COMMITTEE
200 North Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

RE: COMMITTEE SELECTION FOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF OPA
RE-SELECT/APPOINTMENT OF DR FREDERICK PICKEL

TO: Tony Wilkensen

This letter is in response to the committee's request for the communities recommendation for the next appointment for the Executive Director for the Office of Public Accountability/Ratepayer Advocate - I hereby strongly voice / advise the re-selection of Dr. Frederick Pickel.

Under the leadership of Dr. Pickel, his team has demonstrated effective accountability, affirmative perseverance and has strongly impacted the quality of life as a voice & advocate for so many individuals and/or families that struggle financially to resolve LADWP conflicts efficiently. It is important that we never lose site that change starts from the top, and that fabric or culture of any organization's foundation is set by those in a leadership position like Dr Pickel. Therefore, I highly advise that Dr Pickel be re-appointed, so that he & his team can continue to make a difference in the lives of those that are financially disadvantaged.

I have been a resident of the City of Los Angeles for more than 40+ years, and although I might be over the hill in San Fernando Valley - I hope that my voice & opinion to the committee's selection process is not to be dismissed because of my distance from City Hall.

I will be the first to admit that when I found out that the City of Los Angeles had an Office of Public Accountability/Ratepayer Advocate to LADWP ...that I automatically assumed that this department was another layer of unnecessary management & a waste of taxpayers resources. To my surprise, I am pleased to say that I was mistakenly wrong and understand from firsthand experience their importance, and the critical role that Dr Pickel's team participates in the resolution of LADWP customer disputes. Dr Pickel's team is the essential conduit that takes the position as the key mediator, while also being an impelling advocate that gives consumers a voice in resolving the matter at hand.

My testimony to Dr Pickel's leadership & team performance comes from firsthand experience, as I am one of those financially disadvantaged & disabled individuals [that use to be homeless] that had an LADWP complaints that fell upon deaf ears. The only reason my concerns had a voice in resolving my conflict was because Camden Collins from OPA advocated on my behalf. Being a military veteran, I know what it feels like to be just another number, and anticipated a long drawn out resolution process that would have resulted in having my utilities being disconnected because I could not keep my payments current as LADWP would not honor a low-income rate due to the unique use & zoning conflict. Despite the complexity of my issue, Ms Collins was able to halt any required payments, spoke on my behalf to assure that LADWP would not disconnect service until my issue was resolved, that the correct applied credits were refunded, and accomplished a very acceptable compromise in less than 2-months. LADWP final requirement prior to honoring the low income rate was a site inspection. I was expecting a stranger to show up for this inspection 2-3 months later when LADWP eventually gets around to seeing me. It brought great comfort knowing that Ms Collins was going to do the site inspection herself so that I'd get a prompt resolution, and gladly drove out to the West Valley.

OPA's high levels of standards, customer service, culture, expectation, execution & foundation was set by the directives of Dr Pickel. The only reason why Ms Collins was able to promptly execute the site inspection herself was because of the latitude granted under the leadership of Dr Pickel. I have no doubt that I'd still be waiting for LADWP to complete this site inspection ...meanwhile, I'd probably be miserable & in a lot of pain due to the extreme hot temperatures in the Valley causes compounding complications due to my disabilities.

LADWP in many ways has its similarities to the military in terms of seeing things black or white and being very automated that they are not equipped to resolving matters that don't fit into the equation or problem solving model. The last time I checked - most problems aren't black or white, but some sort of shade of grey. Embracing changes like automation is a good thing, and understanding that the human element is an important part of this equation like checks & balances is crucial. The importance of the human element, helping those that are financially restricted, and delivering prompt resolution is clearly reflected in Dr Pickel's leadership, and therefore, should be re-appointed so that he can continue doing the outstanding work already in progress.

Regards,



Melissa Lee
Los Angeles City Resident