

MOTION ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

The recent news about the large number of DWP customers (358,374 or one-fourth of the 1.4 million the utility serves) that had overdue bills in May underlines the financial difficulties that many Angelenos are facing. This news of a 13 percent increase in unpaid bills comes before the recently passed higher water and power rates take effect.

At the same time that the water and power rate increases were approved by Council, the low income subsidy was increased from 15 to 20 percent. While this is good news for the 87,500 customers currently enrolled in the Low Income Discount Rate Program, this group represents a tiny fraction of those families whose income qualified them to take part.

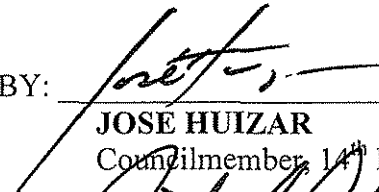
DWP has proposed a plan to increase the number of participants in the Low Income Discount Rate Program, which at its peak reached 200,000 customers before a 1998 audit by the Controller's office led to a purging of people from the list who made more than the maximum allowed income. This issue will be heard in committee soon.

There is a need for better tracking of the progress on issues such as the need for future rate increases and how the department is doing reaching out to its low income, senior and disabled customers to see if they qualify for any of its discount programs. Ideally, this would be done by someone who is perceived by all parties as being impartial and unbiased.

The California regulatory agency that governs investor-owned utilities has independent consumer positions known as the Division of Ratepayer Advocates (DRAs). Their statutory mission is to obtain the lowest possible rate for service consistent with reliable and safe service levels. DRAs also help ensure consumer and environmental protections.

Many newspapers have an ombudsperson on staff to review their news coverage and provide analysis and occasional critiques. The Police Department has an Inspector General to look independently at police policies and procedures in an attempt to ensure they are optimal. The time has arrived for the Department of Water and Power to follow suit.

I THEREFORE MOVE that the Department of Water and Power be requested to establish a fully independent ombudsperson position to provide independent and neutral analysis on future proposals for rate increases and rate restructurings, as well as to track initiatives to increase the number of participants in the department's discount programs so that members of the community and City leadership can be best informed of all relevant issues.

PRESENTED BY: 
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SECONDED BY: 

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