

CONSUMER SPOTLIGHT

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE & CONSUMER AFFAIRS
DIVISION OF CONSUMER ADVOCACY



Executive Director's Message

By: Dean Nishina



Happy fall from the Division of Consumer Advocacy! The past few months have been busy with many public and evidentiary hearings, rate cases, information requests, letters and filings. As always, we are working hard to protect and represent consumers' interests before the Public Utilities

Commission (PUC), the Federal Communications Commission, and other local and federal agencies. We encourage you to contact us or the PUC with comments on any utility application or with your questions, concerns, or complaints related to utility services. Public input helps us understand the consumer's perspective on utility services and rates.

This Consumer Spotlight highlights the issue of utility scams and how you can avoid being conned. There is also an article about the Hu Honua Bioenergy proceedings and Stage 3 Request for Proposals for Hawaii Island. We want to continually inform the public about utility assistance programs available, so visit our website to stay informed! Lastly, there is a short article on 2 current water utility rate cases.

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PUC Public Hearings

For certain applications, such as general rate increases and overhead transmission line through residential area applications, the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) must hold hearings to allow the public and participants to present their viewpoints. It is your opportunity to raise any comments or concerns you might have relating to the purpose for the hearing.

Reading the hearing notice is a good way to acquaint yourself with some of the basic issues that will be raised during the public hearing. Hearing notices can be found on the PUC or Consumer Advocacy website.

<https://cca.hawaii.gov/dca/public-hearings/> has resources to help prepare for and participate in a hearing!



us!

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Stay Vigilant Against Utility Scams

There are two common types of utility scams—the phone call or email from a fake representative of your utility company and the more brazen door-to-door promotional pricing or product scam. The information below will help you identify these cons and avoid being swindled.

Phone Scams:

Criminals try to take advantage of people by calling and demanding payment immediately. These scams tend to use aggressive and intimidating tactics. Well-organized scammers can even spoof, or replicate, the phone number that appears on your caller ID to make it look like it's coming from your utility company.

Demands for prepaid debit or credit cards, gift cards, wire transfers, money orders, or cash are a dead giveaway that the person you're speaking with is trying to scam you.

If you're unsure that you spoke with someone who was trying to scam you, contact your utility company's customer service team. They'll be able to lookup and verify your account status.

Door-to-door Scams:

They impersonate legitimate door-to-door sales representatives and offer to help you get lower rates and save on your energy expenses. They'll try to establish a rapport and gently pull personal details out of you through friendly conversation.

They may ask for your credit card number, bank account information, or your social security number. Some also try to accept checks made out to their name—not the energy company's name—or cash with the promise of a special energy rate or expensive home products.



Back in May 2021, the Hawaii Supreme Court gave new life to Hu Honua Bioenergy LLC's nearly completed biomass plant on Hawaii Island by ruling unanimously in favor of the company's appeal and sent back the case to the state Public Utilities Commission (PUC) with clear instructions on how to proceed.

Hu Honua, which does business as Honua Ola Bioenergy, has been seeking the PUC's approval to begin operating a \$474 million biomass plant in Pepeekeo on the Hamakua Coast that is 99% complete and will burn trees to produce energy. That energy would be purchased by Hawaii Electric Light Co., known as Hawaiian Electric, under an agreement between the two companies.

The proceedings are moving towards a PUC Evidentiary Hearing scheduled to begin in mid-January 2022. Testimony and exhibits by the participants were filed on September 16, 2021. Hawaiian Electric and Hu Honua assert that the PUC should approve the Amended & Revised Power Purchase Agreement (A&R PPA).

The Consumer Advocate has been an active participant in the proceedings and filed and responded to several information requests. Continuing to review the testimonies and exhibits filed by Hawaiian Electric and Hu Honua, the Consumer Advocate has remaining concerns regarding the hidden costs of the greenhouse gas emissions, long term environmental, and public health costs that have not been addressed. At this time the Consumer Advocate does not believe enough justification has been presented for the PUC to approve the project.

The PUC is still filing information requests to the parties and responses to those requests are continuing to be filed. See below for how to view the full proceeding.

(Docket No. 2017-0122)

PUC Docket Numbers are included in these articles for further, in depth reading. PUC public filings are accessible online via the PUC's Document Management System (DMS). Visit: <http://dms.puc.hawaii.gov/dms>

Stage 3 Request for Proposals for Hawaii Island Docket No. 2017-0352

On January 21, 2021, the State of Hawaii Public Utilities Commission (PUC) issued a letter to Hawaiian Electric Light Company, Inc. (HELCO) requesting them to proceed with developing a Stage 3 Request for Proposals (RFP), specifically for Hawaii Island. The letter stated, “the [PUC] intends that this will be an “all-source” procurement, based upon an updated assessment of grid needs for the island, and open to a variety of utility-scale and distributed renewable energy technologies.”

The Hawaii Island RFP is being sought based on the recommendations from the July 2021 Hawaii Island Near-Term Grid Needs Assessment report. There is no specific reliability or shortfall issue that is driving the RFP, but is part of the State’s efforts to attain 100% renewable energy. HELCO is seeking proposals to acquire up to 206 gigawatt hours (“GWh”) annually of energy, and up to 95 megawatts (“MW”) of capacity to meet potential energy reserve margin needs situated on the eastern portion of Hawaii Electric Light’s System.

The RFP is seeking proposals for “all source” renewable dispatchable generation projects (with or without energy storage systems), standalone energy storage projects, and/or aggregated customer-sited distributed energy resources projects. HELCO will also accept proposals from existing renewable generation projects for new terms after the expiration of their current agreements.

The proposed timeline includes filing the proposed final RFP by January 28, 2022, with approval by February 28, 2022. The number of projects that HELCO may acquire from this RFP depends on, among other things, the quality and cost-effectiveness of proposals received in response to this RFP and economic comparison to other RFP responses.

(Docket No. 2017-0352)

UTILITY BILL ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE



The Division of Consumer Advocacy wants to inform consumers of available programs for those who may be in need of financial assistance. Please note that, due to the high demand for assistance, programs may quickly reach capacity.

Visit the Division of Consumer Advocacy website for up to date COVID-19 utility bill assistance <https://cca.hawaii.gov/dca/covid-19-utility-assistance-programs/>.

Kalaeloa Water Company, LLC (KWC) General Rate Increase Application (2021-0005)

KWC is a public utility that owns and operates water and wastewater systems that it acquired from the United States Navy in December 2017, and provides potable water and wastewater services to customers located within a 3,723 acre redevelopment district at Kalaeloa on the island of Oahu.

KWC has filed an application for approval of a general rate increase and revised rules, regulations and rates. In its application, the PUC will investigate whether the proposed revenue increases, changes in rules and regulations, and other matters proposed in KWC’s Application are just and reasonable.

Hawaii American Water Company (HAWC) General Rate Increase Application (2021-0063)

HAWC is seeking approval of a general rate increase for wastewater collection, treatment, and disposal services to residents, condominiums, and commercial establishments in the Hawaii Kai area on the island of Oahu.

Public Hearings

A virtual public hearing has taken place for both of these rate cases. Recordings of the hearings can be found on the PUC [Youtube channel](#).

We encourage the public to file comments relating to these applications with the PUC [here](#). Please also email a copy to the Division of Consumer Advocacy: dca@dcca.hawaii.gov.

Upcoming Dates of Interest

- **November 25, 2021: Thanksgiving** (State holiday, office will be closed)
- **December 9, 2021: Public Hearing** HECO construction of overhead and underground line (2021-0070)
- **December 24, 2021: Christmas Eve** (State holiday, office will be closed)

MYTH NO. **5**
Smart meters
are an invasion
of privacy.

MYTHS VS. FACTS: THE TRUTH ABOUT SMART METERS

TRUTH: Smart meters measure how much energy you use, based on time of day, not how you use that energy. Unless you install a home energy management system, smart meters cannot tell whether the energy used is from your oven, air conditioner, or hairdryer.

TRUTH: Utilities adhere to strict policies, following state laws that regulate the use of personal information for business functions like billing and customer service.

Smart meters are a landmark change allowing two-way communication between your utility and you, much like cell phones and banking. Utilities keep your data private and secure, similar to those industries and similar to how it's always been.

STAY TUNED FOR MORE MYTHS VS. FACTS

Consumer
Spotlight

Subscribe to DCA's newsletter

Subscribe on our website at cca.hawaii.gov/dca/subscribe.

We also welcome feedback and story ideas. Email us at dca@dcca.hawaii.gov.

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