

# **PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AT FERC ACT (S.1477)**

*Legislation led by Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH)*

The Public Engagement at FERC Act will improve robust public involvement at the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) and facilitate advocacy at the agency on behalf of residential and small commercial energy consumers. Specifically, the Public Engagement at FERC Act would establish an Office of Public Participation and Consumer Advocacy to ensure the public has a strong role in shaping our nation's energy future.

## **Background**

As one of the lead agencies responsible for developing energy infrastructure and ensuring reliability of the electric grid, FERC has ultimate jurisdiction over the rates and services of the wholesale electricity markets, licensing of non-federal hydro power and natural gas pipeline siting and permitting. While FERC's decisions significantly influence the energy prices consumers pay, as well as impact energy infrastructure siting, private citizens have expressed frustration that participating in FERC's complex proceedings is extremely challenging.

As Federal policies continue to expand FERC's impact on utility bills paid by families and small businesses, it is critical that the public's interests are meaningfully considered.

In 1978, Congress authorized FERC to create an Office of Public Participation under the Public Utility Regulatory Policy Act (PURPA) that would assist public and consumer advocates in intervening at FERC. While the authorization has been in effect for nearly 40 years, the Office of Public Participation was never created. The Public Engagement at FERC Act would update and strengthen the 1978 PURPA language to better ensure that the Commission is making decisions that are in the best interest of those who will be most impacted.

## **What the Public Engagement at FERC Act Will Do**

- Establish an office that would directly participate in FERC proceedings on rates, service, and infrastructure siting to represent the interests of residential and small commercial consumers.
- Employ directed outreach methods, such as consultation services and technical assistance, to ensure the interests of the public are adequately represented at FERC.
- Create a Public and Consumer Advocacy Advisory Committee for the office composed of representatives from the national and state-based nongovernmental consumer advocacy community.
- Prepare reports and issue guidance for potential improvements to industry and FERC practices to better incorporate the public voice.
- Provide intervenor funding to individuals or small commercial energy consumer groups to encourage their participation in FERC proceedings.

*This legislation has received support from the following organizations:*

- *National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC)*
- *National Association of State Energy Officials (NASEO)*
- *National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates (NASUCA)*
- *Union of Concerned Scientists*
- *National Consumer Law Center, on behalf of its low-income clients*
- *Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)*
- *Public Citizen*
- *Consumers Union*
- *Greenlining Institute*
- *Alliance for Affordable Energy*
- *Sierra Club*
- *TURN—The Utility Reform Network*
- *Citizens Action Coalition*
- *Arizona PIRG*
- *Illinois PIRG*
- *Maryland PIRG*