

## Legislature Passes Bill to Strengthen Advocacy for Residential, Small Business Utility Customers

For Immediate Release:

March 23, 2021

More Information:

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A plan to help level the playing field between consumers and utilities when it comes to advocacy for fairness and affordability is on the way to Gov. Tony Evers' desk, after the state Senate unanimously endorsed it in a voice vote Tuesday.

The bill, AB 27 and SB 47, received widespread bipartisan support, with unanimous votes in the Legislature's utilities committees as well as the state Assembly and Senate. The bill creates a new funding model for the Citizens Utility Board of Wisconsin, the state's consumer advocate for residential and small business utility customers.

"Wisconsin homeowners, renters and small businesses will now have an even more effective consumer advocate working on their behalf in the years ahead," said Tom Content, CUB's executive director. "I want to thank the bill's authors, state Rep. Mike Kuglitsch and state Sen. Julian Bradley, as well as PSC Chair Rebecca Cameron Valcq, for their tireless efforts to advance this legislation that strengthens CUB's advocacy for Wisconsin citizens and businesses. I'd also like to thank Majority Leader Devin LeMahieu, who was a co-author of the 2020 version of this bill."

Under the bill, CUB can apply for up to \$900,000 a year in ratepayer funding, through a process overseen by the Public Service Commission, to help support its advocacy work. This would replace an annual \$300,000 PSC grant. The funding would enable CUB to expand its regulatory team negotiating across the table from utilities to achieve rate settlements that benefit customers.

The bill now heads to the desk of Gov. Evers, who previously endorsed the new consumer advocate proposal and included it in his biennial budget proposal.

"We look forward to the Governor signing this bill into law soon," Content said. "That signature will be the biggest step forward for utility customer advocacy in Wisconsin since Gov. Lee Dreyfus' signature enacted the bill that created the nation's first Citizens Utility Board in 1979."

The legislative change became critical for consumers after the Legislature passed a law three years ago that encourages utilities to negotiate across the table from customer groups to make the rate case proceedings at the Public Service Commission more efficient for all. Unfortunately, that settlements law created a new hurdle for CUB that this legislation resolves. The bill approved Tuesday allows CUB to be more nimble, enabling it to better represent small utility customers in future settlement cases, as well as a wider range of PSC actions that affect customers' bills.

Under the new model, the residential and small commercial and industrial ratepayers of investor-owned utilities would contribute less than 2 cents a month to fund consumer advocacy work by CUB. CUB expects there will be a strong return for ratepayers from the additional investment from ratepayers. CUB projects millions of dollars in incremental ratepayer savings resulting from the work of its new regulatory team.

“CUB appreciates the widespread support received from the business community, the utilities, CUB members, other stakeholders and now the entire Legislature,” said Content. “This is a solution everyone can live with. The unanimous votes in the Assembly and the Senate show that everyone wins when the citizens of Wisconsin have a strong and independent consumer advocate working for them.”

CUB wishes to thank the following supporters of this legislation: Alliant Energy Corp., American Transmission Co., Customers First! Coalition, Dairyland Power Cooperative, Madison Gas and Electric Co., Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce, Municipal Electric Utilities of Wisconsin, National Federation of Independent Business, NextEra Energy Resources, Northern States Power/Xcel Energy, Public Service Commission of Wisconsin, Renew Wisconsin, WEC Energy Group Inc. (parent of We Energies and Wisconsin Public Service), Wisconsin Apartment Association, Wisconsin Independent Businesses Inc., Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce, Wisconsin Utilities Association, Wisconsin Utility Investors Inc. and WPPI Energy.

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*More information on the bill is available at:*

<https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2021/proposals/ab27>

To learn more about CUB, check out [www.cubwi.org](http://www.cubwi.org).

The Citizens Utility Board is a member-supported, nonprofit organization that advocates for efficient and reliable utility service at the lowest rates possible consistent with sound business principles. CUB represents the interests of Wisconsin's residential, farm, and small business customers of electric and natural gas utilities before the Legislature, state and federal regulatory agencies, and the courts.