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Lawmakers Call on Governor to Sign Bill Into Law to Lower Utility Costs at Carlucci's Senior Fair

(Suffern, NY) – Senator David Carlucci (D-Rockland/Westchester) and fellow lawmakers gathered for the Senator's 8th annual Senior Fair at Rockland Community College in Suffern. The Senior Fair looks to connect seniors with legal, recreational, financial, and housing services in the community.

At a press conference to kick off the event, lawmakers addressed seniors about skyrocketing utility costs. Senator Carlucci noted that this year the Public Service Commission allowed Orange & Rockland to increase customers' electric bills on average about \$2.90 per month, which will go up through 2021 to about \$3.04. Further, Suez Water New York is seeking to raise rates in Rockland by 18.6% over three years or about \$10.50 a month.

Carlucci explained legislation (S.4399/A.1966) to establish the State Office of the Utility Consumer Advocate is necessary to help prevent these rate hikes and potentially help lower customer's utility bills. This legislation is now on the Governor's desk. Senator Carlucci, Senator James Skoufis, and Assemblymembers Ellen Jaffee and Ken Zebrowski along with County lawmakers called for the bill to be signed into law.

Senator David Carlucci and bill co-sponsor said, "We need this legislation signed into law now because many seniors in Rockland are on fixed incomes and cannot afford to pay their utility bills. Despite O&R and Suez seeing windfalls in profits, they continue to get rate increases approved. This is why we need a Consumer Utility Advocate to have a seat at the table during PSC hearings. A consumer utility advocate will fight on behalf of rate payers and help prevent further rate hikes."

Assemblywoman Ellen Jaffee and bill co-sponsor said, "As our population of older and retired New Yorkers continues to grow and more seniors are living on limited incomes, the Consumer Utility Advocate will play a vital role representing those who are struggling with ever-increasing utility bills, pushing back on rate hikes, standing up to corporate greed and saving consumers hard earned money. I urge Governor Cuomo to sign this critical legislation into law."

Rockland County Executive Ed Day said, "The number of Americans ages 65 and older is projected to nearly double in the next four decades. We must continue to do everything we can to advocate for them while protect their best interests and ability to age in place. I want to thank Rockland's State Legislators who worked to see this bill passed and I look forward to the Governor signing it into law. We have seen

locally how an empowered Office of Consumer Protection can help residents. Having an Office like this on the state level will be a significant step forward and will ensure that utility companies deal with all of us fairly.”

In other states where a utility advocate office exists, residential consumers have seen drastic savings. In California, their Division of Ratepayer Advocates lobbied over 200 times on behalf of California consumers and saved them over \$4 billion in rates saved and increases avoided. It’s estimated for every \$1 the office spent representing and advocating on behalf of California's public utility customers, the average customer saved \$153 per year.

Lawmakers said more than 40 states and the District of Columbia have an independent state agency that represents the interests of residential utility customers. New York is by far the largest state, without such an independent office.

Governor Cuomo has until December 31st to sign this legislation into law, which passed through the full legislature in June.