

Good Afternoon Commissioners and members of the audience, I am Sandra Mattavous-Frye, People's Counsel for the District of Columbia.

As a utility consumer advocate, my primary obligation to low-and moderate-income consumers, is to ensure that they stay connected to the utility network and are provided reliable and affordable utility services. It is important to include both groups because many of these consumers are having to make tough monthly decisions as to which critical commodity they are going to pay for -- food, medicine or utility service. These realities are also major impediments to the delivery of advanced technologies to LMI consumers.

Fundamentally, affordability and access, leveraged by demographic disparities, are the driving forces that hinder the equitable distribution of advanced technologies to LMI customers.

## **Demographics**

Washington DC is one of the most powerful and wealthiest cities in the world. Yet, nearly 60% of DC utility consumers are

of Low and Moderate Income. The District's Median income of \$97K is nearly twice the US median of \$50,000 per year.

Ironically, District consumers in this income bracket constitute the majority of utility consumers in the LMI category. So not only are the stereotypical "poor" consumers impacted by cost, but also the "working poor" consumer feels the effect of high utility costs.

In the District of Columbia, 31% of renter households are extremely low income, of these, 64% spend more than 30% of their income on utility services. Although Low income residential households can receive assistance equaling about 30% of their monthly bill, 1 in 5 of these LMI consumers receive disconnection notices each month.

## **Affordability**

Affordability, in terms of the energy burden of basic service and the required upfront investment for advanced technology inhibits adoption of some new technologies such as electric charging stations, fuel storage and solar installations. In many jurisdictions there is limited or no available public funding

for these programs. It is easy to see why deploying advanced technologies to this large block of consumers is stalled, abandoned or fails to get out of the policy think box.

While this challenge is daunting, I believe solutions that benefit all ratepayers can be developed. For example, several years ago, a DC Dynamic Pricing Pilot program demonstrated that LMI customers responded to pricing signals at higher rates than other consumers to achieve program benefits.

As we develop plans to ensure the benefits of technology for the general body of consumers, we must think in terms of *equity*. We must explore multiple options that meet the needs of a more economically diverse consumer base. There is no “one size fits all solution.”

My office is conducting an affordability study to obtain empirical data about how changes to, utility discount programs, the renewable Portfolio Standard and solar deployment, affect energy affordability. We expect the study to play a vital role in our future policy decisions.

## **Access to Advanced Technology**

Deploying advanced Technologies for LMI customers is an on-going challenge. Access issues manifest in both the level of consumer awareness of available benefits and existing physical limitations like non-weatherized homes. In addition, the District has a high percentage of renters in high-rise and multi-family buildings, where challenges to locating and installing solar frequently retards investment. In many instances it is the landlords, rather than the tenants who make the property improvement decisions.

Unfortunately, the marketplace is biased towards developing solar-ready rooftops and has demonstrated little or no interest in providing renewable energy access for LMI consumers. Another market-based challenge is low EV ownership in the LMI community. Hence, the burden falls to legislatures and regulators to facilitate technology equity.

Here are a few of the initiatives being undertaken in the District:

- **Grid Modernization** the DC Public Service Commission has an open docket “**MEDSIS**” which stands for Modernizing the Energy Delivery System for Increased Sustainability. OPC participates in all MEDSIS stakeholder working groups.
- The DC Sustainable Energy Utility or “SEU” Is a private contractor with the District that provides DC residents and businesses a one stop resource for sustainable energy programs. OPC and the PSC are statutory members of the SEU advisory board.
- **Solar For All** is a DC program designed to provide free solar installations to 100,000 LMI consumers and deliver a 50% utility savings over 15 years.
- DC is actively pursuing **Community Solar**. My office is conducting a study to facilitate implementation of community solar by LMI communities.
- **DC RPS** requirements have increased to now require 100% renewable energy supply by the year 2032.

## **Other District policies and Best Practices**

To increase consumer awareness of the availability of advanced technology options, OPC conducts community forums, provides an extensive list of education materials and communicates through social media, multi-media and multi-language tools. Both current and future programs should reduce annual energy bills by as much as \$500 per household.

DC OPC plans is to augment the city's progress by utilizing our studies, results from various pilot programs and available best practices to ensure that all consumers, including LMI customers can afford and access advanced technologies on an equitable basis.

Needless to say, our work is cut out for us.