

4th Quarterly Report of Consumer Advocate for Q4 2024 (October–November 15, 2024)

4th Quarterly Report of the 2024 Interim Independent Consumer Advocate (“ICA” or “Consumer Advocate”) for the Metropolitan District of Hartford County (MDC)

(Portion of Q4 2024: October 1, 2024 – November 15, 2024)

Introduction

This is the fourth and final quarterly report submitted by the Consumer Advocate. Due to the fact that the ICA ultimately was forced to submit his letter of resignation in early November, making his resignation effective as of November 15, 2024, the work summarized herein only covers that time period.

ICA Annual Public Consumer Forum

As of the beginning of October 2024, a successor ICA still had not been appointed given the lack of applications. Therefore, the ICA prepared for the Annual Consumer Public Forum with increased intensity during the first week of this quarter. In that vein, the ICA had to review notes, written communications with MDC Staff and Commissioners, written communications with customers, and relevant statutes and other laws in order to present at the Forum on October 9, 2024.

On October 9, 2024, the ICA hosted the Annual Public Consumer Forum at the MDC’s Board Room (also via WebEx). Once again, the Forum unfortunately lacked attendees by MDC customers and other members of the public. There were at least two members of the public who attended, and the ICA again wishes to thank those attendees for their interest and participation. Also like the prior year’s Forum, there were several Commissioners and MDC Staff in attendance, including Chairman Currey and Vice-Chairman DiBella. The ICA spent time talking about what he saw as the most pressing issues for MDC consumers and he attempted to summarize the limited work he performed throughout the first three quarters of 2024.

Customer Complaints and Inquiries

During this partial quarter, I only was able to address three complaints or inquiries that were brought to my attention by individual customers. These matters are described as follows:

- I advised a Hartford customer regarding how she might be able to seek property damage relief through the MDC’s new Sewer Connection Program and/or other procedures, in light of the customer’s having sustained substantial flooding damage in her property’s basement.
- I provided information to a Newington customer who wanted more information about a Notice of Unknown Service Line Material that he had received in the mail from the MDC. His chief concern was that the QR code provided on the notice was malfunctioning, leading him to believe that the notice was fake. With the help of MDC staff, we advised the customer that the Notice was legitimate and that it was related to the EPA’s updated Lead & Copper Rule and the MDC’s newly updated regulatory measures to notify customers. (See <https://themdc.org/water-service-line-inventory-compliance/>).

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- I advised a customer—who had complained about having received damage to his car after driving near an MDC construction site—about how to file a claim and seek other relief with MDC’s Staff. I also attempted to clarify some of the issues surrounding liability, and investigated the relevant facts presented by the customer.

Transition to Successor Consumer Advocate and Resignation

Once again during this quarter, the Consumer Advocate prioritized helping the OCC and MDC in trying to find qualified applicants for the ICA position. I continued trying to promote the position to other attorneys who might qualify, and I thought of other ways to increase interest in the position, but most of my ideas had already been considered.

As a result of my increased unavailability due to the demands of other client litigation matters, in addition to the fact that this may also help to increase interest in the ICA position amongst potential applicants—at the end of October 2024, I officially decided to resign from the ICA position. In this vein, I worked with the District Clerk, Consumer Counsel Coleman, and the rest of the OCC Staff in order to prepare my Letter of Resignation and associated documentation. I ultimately submitted that Letter to the District Clerk in advance of the November 6, 2024 District Board Meeting, and my resignation became effective as of November 15, 2024. For purposes of clarity, I wish to note that the fees that I billed for ICA work performed during 2024 through the date of my resignation in November amounted to a total of \$10,329.60. I now shall conclude this fourth and final quarterly report of 2024 by repeating the contents of my letter of resignation, which state the following:

Dear Chairman Currey, MDC Commissioners, and Consumer Counsel Coleman:

This letter serves as official notice of my intention to resign as the current Independent Consumer Advocate (ICA) for the Metropolitan District of Hartford County (MDC) consumers, effective as of November 15, 2024.

As most of you know, I served as the ICA for the entirety of the 2022-23 term, which began on January 1, 2022 and ended on December 31, 2023. Although I publicly announced that I would not continue serving in the role for the 2024-25 term, I nevertheless agreed with the MDC and the Office of Consumer Counsel (OCC) to continue acting in this capacity on an interim basis until my successor was appointed in 2024. Thus, for the past calendar year I have continued working on a limited basis as the ICA, and to that end I have tried to serve the collective needs and interests of MDC’s consumers.

I acknowledge that I have not billed a substantial amount of fees for work performed in my capacity as the ICA during the 2024 calendar year. To be clear, I conscientiously billed a limited amount of fees for my ICA-related work this past year for a host of reasons, not the least of which is the fact that my other client matters have been quite demanding as of late. Moreover, I have tried to limit my ICA-related fees this past year given my understanding that any fees billed would count towards the statutory

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annual cap of \$70,000, as set forth in the ICA’s enabling legislation, section 7-334a of the Connecticut General Statutes. Thus, unless there were customer emergencies or other pressing matters requiring my immediate action, I tried to approach MDC/ICA-related work in 2024 in a manner that would not unduly constrain my successor’s ability to begin working in 2024. Notwithstanding, given my other client matters and professional responsibilities, I now can no longer serve as the ICA, even on an interim basis.

I remain to be committed toward helping in any way that I can, and I look forward to following along as the MDC carries out its important policy initiatives in the future. In particular, I hope that these at least will include protecting the environment, preserving the general public’s welfare and customer health and safety, and being fiscally responsible.

It goes without saying that it truly has been an honor and a privilege to serve as the ICA for the MDC’s customers over the past several years. It also goes without saying that it has been a pleasure and an honor to work with CEO Jellison, with District Counsel Stone and District Clerk Mirtle, with all of the Commissioners, with Consumer Counsel Coleman and her staff, as well as with all of the MDC’s hard-working staff. Finally, it has been a pleasure working alongside policy advocates and other members of the public who have stepped up and devoted their time, energy, and attention towards advocating on behalf of MDC’s customers. Although I will do my best to assist my successor going forward, I am certain that all of you will play a role in facilitating the next ICA’s agenda.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to serve as the ICA for MDC customers over the past several years, and I wish you all and the next ICA the best of luck.

Respectfully submitted,



Joseph D. Szerejko
Independent Consumer Advocate (Interim) for 2024