

Date of Hearing: May 7, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON UTILITIES AND ENERGY

Cottie Petrie-Norris, Chair

AB 1436 (Ávila Farías) – As Amended April 2, 2025

SUBJECT: Public Utilities Commission: outreach

SUMMARY: This bill removes the provision that the Policy and Planning Division of the commission must study outreach efforts undertaken by other state and federal utility regulatory bodies to make recommendations to the commission to promote effective outreach, including metrics for use in evaluating success.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Mandates that the Policy and Planning Division of the California Public Utility Commission (CPUC) shall undertake one or more studies of outreach efforts undertaken by other state and federal utility regulatory bodies and make recommendations to the commission to promote effective outreach, including metrics for use in evaluating success. This subdivision shall remain in effect only until January 1, 2020, and shall have no force or effect on or after that date, unless a later enacted statute that is chaptered before January 1, 2020, deletes or extends that date. (Public Utilities Code § 1711)

FISCAL EFFECT: No fiscal impact.

CONSUMER COST IMPACTS: Unknown

BACKGROUND:

Outreach at the CPUC – The CPUC's External Affairs Division assists customers with utility complaints and provides information and assistance to the media, local governments and community organizations, the public, and other stakeholders about the CPUC's many pioneering and innovative programs, policies, and proceedings. The office consists of:

- News division, which prepares news releases, consumer advisories, brochures and other informational pieces, provides graphical services, conducts interviews with reporters and also arranges interviews with Commissioners, Directors, and staff experts. The office also oversees the CPUC's websites and social media platforms.
- Public Advisor's Office, which provides procedural information to individuals and groups who want to participate in formal proceedings, and oversees the TEAM and CHANGES programs.
- Business and Community Outreach Office, which focuses on outreach to stakeholders, the Supplier Diversity Program, and the Small Business program.
- Consumer Affairs Branch (CAB), which assists consumers of regulated gas, electric, water, and telecommunications utilities with billing and service matters. CAB answers

questions, processes informal complaints, and helps resolve application denials (appeals) for the California LifeLine program participation.

Senate Bill 512 – In January 2017, the California Legislature directed the CPUC to improve public accessibility and to seek the participation of members of the public who may be affected by a decision in a proceeding. Senate Bill 512 (Hill, Chapter 808, Statutes of 2016) directed the CPUC to “undertake one or more studies of outreach efforts undertaken by other state and federal utility regulatory bodies and to make recommendations to the commission to promote effective outreach.”

The SB 512 Research Project Report was published in April 2018. The News and Outreach Office at the CPUC, in consultation with the Policy and Planning division, interviewed 42 regulatory agencies throughout the U.S. on their outreach activities.¹ The study concluded that the CPUC is within the norms of other institutions but also identified additional outreach methods that the commission could implement moving forward. The recommendations from this study included:

- Fine tune CPUC communications strategies
- Utilize technology to increase public participation
- Provide for personal contact with CPUC decision-makers and staff
- Begin to consider new metrics to evaluate success

COMMENTS:

- 1) *Author’s Statement.* According to the author: “Current law requires the California Public Utilities Commission to conduct outreach and engagement activities before determining the scope of a proceeding in order to seek the participation of those likely to be affected by its outcome. AB 1436 cleans up the Public Utilities Code by deleting an obsolete provision, which required an outreach study that was completed in 2018.”
- 2) *Purpose of the Bill.* The purpose of this bill is to clean up Public Utilities Code § 1711, removing reference to a mandate for the CPUC to generate a study to evaluate outreach efforts at the CPUC by January 1, 2020. The mandated study was published in April 2018.
- 3) *Prior Legislation.*

SB 512 (Hill) makes various changes to processes to provide improved transparency of California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) activities and make revisions to rules governing intervenor compensation to allow local governments to receive such compensation, as specified. Status: Chapter 808, Statutes of 2016.

¹ CPUC, “512 Research Project Report” April 2018

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

None reported after significant revisions to the bill.

Opposition

None reported after significant revisions to the bill.

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