

HCS HB 748 -- EXPENSES OF THE OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC COUNSEL

SPONSOR: Van Schoiack

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on Utilities by a vote of 22 to 0. Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Rules-Administrative by a vote of 8 to 0.

The following is a summary of the House Committee Substitute for HB 748.

This bill requires that before the beginning of each fiscal year, the Public Counsel must make an estimate of expenses his office will incur reasonably attributable to the performance of his powers, duties, and functions and must also estimate the amount directly attributable to each of the specified public utilities. Telephone and telegraph corporations are exempt from the provisions of the bill. The bill specifies how the Public Counsel is to attribute such expenses.

The Public Counsel must assess the amount allocated to each group in proportion to the groups respective gross intrastate operating revenues for the previous year, except that the total assessed to all public utilities must not exceed 0.057 of one percent of the total gross intrastate operating revenues. The Public Counsel must provide the assessment to each public utility before July 1st of each year and the utility must pay the assessment as specified in the bill.

This bill establishes "The Office of the Public Counsel Fund". The Fund consists of moneys paid for assessments and is to be solely used for the payment of expenditures incurred by the Public Counsel and attributable to the regulation of public utilities under the jurisdiction of the Public Service Commission.

This bill is similar SB 4 (2025).

The following is a summary of the public testimony from the committee hearing. The testimony was based on the introduced version of the bill.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that the Office of Public Counsel represents the general public in rate cases before the Public Service Commission. The office is currently funded out of General Revenue, which is paid into by all Missourians regardless of their utility providers. This bill would allow the Office to be funded by an assessment against the utilities.

Testifying in person for the bill were Representative Van Schoiack; John Clizer and Dr. Geoff Marke, Missouri Office of the Public Counsel.

OPPONENTS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.

OTHERS: Others testifying on the bill say that there needs to be a funding framework for the Office, but negotiations are ongoing to set that framework. In addition, telephone and telegraph service should be exempted from the bill. Telephone service was deregulated 15 years ago and is no longer under the Commission.

Testifying in person on the bill were At&T and Missouri Energy Development Association.

Written testimony has been submitted for this bill. The full written testimony and witnesses testifying online can be found under Testimony on the bill page on the House website.