Thank You!

Many TURN members have expressed concern about PG&E’s choice to file for bankruptcy, and questioned whether the company will be able to keep our lights on. That certainly wasn’t the case the last time PG&E chose the bankruptcy route, and we don’t expect it to be this time. But that doesn’t mean we want to see a repeat of PG&E’s last bankruptcy performance which featured customers paying billions and shareholders getting off scot-free.

The threats customers are facing from this bankruptcy are the same threats they’ve historically faced from PG&E - higher rates and criminal negligence. TURN is working hard to make sure customers don’t get stuck holding the bag for liabilities that result from negligence. None of us have signed up for that. TURN has filed a formal motion to the bankruptcy court demanding a seat at the table for the consumers we represent.

“Customers have at least as much at stake as any other constituency in PG&E’s Chapter 11 case,” said TURN Executive Director Mark Toney. “Customers generate nearly all of PG&E’s revenues, and hence are its main source of income. Bondholders, banks and others who are represented by creditors’ committees aren’t likely to care how much of their claims come out of customers’ pockets. It’s undemocratic for us to be left out.”

Left: TURN’s Executive Director Mark Toney delivered 1700 of your petitions to the bankruptcy court in San Francisco.

TURN has filed a formal motion to the bankruptcy court demanding a seat at the table for the consumers we represent.
I have some great news to share with you! In the past few months, TURN has been in demand like never before—especially by elected officials and the press. I had 12 media interviews during the 24 hours after PG&E announced its plans to file bankruptcy on January 13. We’re talking all five television stations in the Bay Area, LA Times, SF Chronicle, SJ Mercury, Sac/Fresno Bee, and major national press including the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, National Public Radio, Bloomberg Business, Reuters, and Slate.com. This is the biggest local and national coverage that TURN has ever received. It provides a platform to express your concerns that the bankruptcy filing is just a sneaky way for PG&E to get a bailout and that innocent customers should never have to pay for wildfires caused by utility negligence. My deepest thanks go to Communications Chief Mindy Spatt for expert messaging and for wrangling reporters.

Receiving an invitation from Governor Newsom to sit in the Capitol Gallery for his February 12th State of the State Address is a clear indication of elected officials paying attention to TURN. I arrived early at the Governor’s Office, was given a fancy ticket, and was escorted with other guests to the Assembly Chambers to my assigned seat. It was gratifying to hear Governor Newsom echo the very same messages that TURN has been demanding for so long, when he said: “We are all frustrated and angry that it’s come to this. PG&E didn’t do enough to secure dangerous equipment or plan for the future. We will seek justice for fire victims, fairness for employees, and protection for ratepayers. We must map out longer-term strategies…to ensure that the cost of climate change doesn’t fall on those least able to afford it.”

Our job at TURN will be to hold Governor Newsom to his commitments.

It was almost as if Mindy had written the words for him. His remarks clearly show that he and his staff have been listening very carefully to what TURN has been saying.

The highlight of the day was the State of the State Reception in the Governor’s Mansion later in the afternoon where I got a chance to speak directly with Governor Newsom for the first time. While my time with him was necessarily brief, I was able to make three points. First, that TURN is the leader in defending energy and telecom ratepayers. Second, that protection of ratepayers and protection of the environment must go hand in hand, if bills are to be kept affordable. Finally, that he can count on TURN to work with his office to develop wildfire prevention and wildfire liability policy solutions. I was approached by several legislative leaders who wanted to hear TURN’s proposals for stopping wildfires and for paying for property damage. The most remarkable thing about the reception was that among the two dozen outside guests who were in attendance, there were no corporate lobbyists and no major donors. Zero. Everybody else was either an elected official or member of the Governor’s staff.

From everything I have seen, from his State of the State Address and the high caliber of Governor staff hires to his impressive appointments to the CPUC and Wildfire Commission, Governor Newsom is off to a strong start when it comes to protecting California consumers. Our job at TURN will be to hold Governor Newsom to his commitments to hold PG&E and other utilities accountable for their own actions. I need to count on your support more than ever for TURN to make the most of this historic opportunity to influence the direction of state policy.
Know Your Consumer Rights!

In the past year, hundreds of consumers spoke out and fought back against poor service, high rates, unfair billing practices, lack of transparency, unscrupulous marketers, cutbacks in wireline phone service, safety concerns and shutoffs. For many of the consumers consulting TURN, the fix was as simple as knowing their rights. For others, it was a long process, which required more work and most importantly, filing a complaint with the CPUC.

One of the most common complaints is that bills are too high. That is certainly true, but in some cases there may be discounts and savings available that you are not taking advantage of.

SAVINGS YOU MAY BE MISSING

- If you have a medical condition, sign up for Medical Baseline. This program provides an increase in your baseline allowance (the amount of energy that is charged at the lowest possible rate). It is available to customers at any income level. Both the customer and their doctor must complete a Medical Baseline application. To learn more, call your utility company.

- Opt-Out customers’ analog meters are read every other month. During months when meters are not read, customers will receive an estimated bill. If your meter is not read for several months, file a complaint with the CPUC so that the bill can be “trued up.”

You should not have to keep paying more than you owe based on estimated bills.

- If you believe your bill is incorrect, contact your utility’s customer service office immediately at the telephone number printed on the front of your bill. If you are not satisfied with the company’s response, file a complaint with the CPUC in order to keep service on during the investigation.

YOUR RIGHT TO REPAIRS

- If you are having an outage or experiencing poor service quality with your wireline phone service call the company to request a repair. Phone companies should be able to fix an outage quickly, within 24 hours. Other problems such as static, cross talk or failure to connect, could take longer to repair. While there is no specific requirement for a phone company to fix your lines within a certain number of hours or days, phone companies must report outages and repairs to the CPUC. If you have service quality problems that are not being addressed in a timely manner, you should call the CPUC right away and report the problem.

- Customers of PG&E and Edison will receive a credit of $30 for a missed appointment unless certain exceptions apply. SoCal Gas will waive its service appointment charge if they miss the first appointment unless certain exceptions apply.

Your Right to Speak Out!

Don’t be afraid to file a complaint with the California Public Utilities Commission. The CPUC provides oversight for major utilities like PG&E, SCE, SoCal Gas and SDG&E, and light regulation for landline, cell, and VOIP service. By filing your complaint, you create a documented paper trail that helps TURN fight for you.

- You can file your complaint online at www.turn.org
- If your utility service has been shut off or is in danger of being shut off call the CPUC immediately at 800 649-7570.
- You can also mail your complaint to: CPUC Consumer Affairs Branch 505 Van Ness Ave San Francisco, CA 94102-3298

Check out the new FAQs on our website. Everything you ever wanted to know about gas, electric and phone service is at www.turn.org/telecom-faq/ and www.turn.org/energy-faq/. TURN members can contact our Consumer Advisor Ana Montes by calling TURN’s consumer hotline at 800-355-8876, or you can email her at consumerhotline@turn.org.

STAY EMPOWERED!
Visit www.turn.org for more money savings tips and FAQs.
WILDFIRES AT THE FOREFRONT

The devastating wildfires that swept across California in the last few years have brought a new urgency to TURN’s work. While fighting tooth and nail to protect customers from paying the costs of utility negligence—costs that historically and legally have been placed at shareholders’ doors—TURN’s telecom and energy attorneys are also aggressively seeking ways to make emergency notifications and ‘de-energizations’ safer, and analyzing new wildfire mitigation plans that carry enormous price tags but not necessarily enormous benefits. Staff Attorney Katy Morsony joined TURN in Fall of 2018 with substantial experience in safety issues and will play a key role in upcoming wildfire proceedings.

Putting Safety First

The importance of repairing damaged utility poles quickly would seem to be a no-brainer. But lax rules had given companies unlimited time to accomplish needed repairs, putting customers’ safety at risk. Staff Attorney Ashley Salas successfully advocated for a system of prioritizing the most urgent repair projects and forbidding utilities from deferring or ignoring pole repairs that post a risk to safety and reliability.

The utilities eventually agreed to the demands of TURN and our allies, including the expedited repair of overhead facilities, tightened requirements for reporting and correcting violations, and the establishment of deadlines. In addition, utilities will be required to keep better records of pole maintenance projects. Salas said the agreement “balances the equally important concerns of cost and safety while maintaining an effective method of prioritizing repairs without unduly burdening customers.”
New Accountability Standards for Mitigating Safety Risks

The first step in reducing safety risks is identifying them, but that isn't something utilities have been effective at in the past. Left to their own devices, utilities will invoke safety risks to justify inflated spending forecasts in rate cases, without including the details of any risk-based prioritization or mitigation programs. So when spending is approved for safety projects, the CPUC has been unable to hold companies accountable for maximizing the benefits customers actually get out of their investment. This method obviously wasn't working, and was one that TURN had advocated to change.

“TURN has been pushing for the utilities to use a better and more transparent methodology for determining their most significant safety risks and how to best address those risks for three years,” said TURN Legal Director Tom Long. “The utilities finally agreed to use the key elements of a methodology that TURN championed for prioritizing safety risks and ranking proposed mitigation efforts based on cost-effectiveness.”

Going forward utilities will be required to identify the risk mitigation efforts that will deliver the most safety benefits per dollar, which should achieve the twin benefits of enhancing safety and avoiding a waste of customers’ hard-earned money.

Permanent Protections for Wildfire Victims

In the wake of the 2017 wildfires, TURN proposed a set of consumer protections which were adopted by the California Public Utilities Commission on an emergency basis. In 2018 the CPUC moved toward making these emergency protections permanent.

They are designed to alleviate the burdens on consumers whose energy or telecom service is interrupted by disasters to re-establish service and avoid paying fees normally associated with changes in service. TURN Managing Attorney Christine Mailloux said, “these protections are the minimum that companies are required to do, and customers have a right to them. But of course, utility companies can decide to do more on their own, especially when the repercussions of disasters are extreme.”

Key protections, which are triggered by a declaration of a state of emergency by the Governor, include:

- Disconnection for nonpayment suspended
- Deposits and late fees waived
- CARE eligibility reviews frozen
- Fees waived for phone service activation, new jacks and wiring
- Lifeline rules for renewals and usage requirements suspended

TURN may have lost the battle in the legislature over SB 901 but we won it in the media, where our labeling of the “Wildfire Prevention Act” as a bailout bill stuck throughout, and editorials from all the major newspapers agreed with TURN that PG&E should not get a customer bailout for wildfire negligence. The debate spilled over to Twitter, where TURN’s following dramatically increased.

Communications Chief Mindy Spatt found herself answering more media calls than ever before as national attention increasingly turned to the wildfires plaguing California and likely utility responsibility. “Utility companies, investors and insurance companies all want to spin themselves as the victims,” Spatt said. “We make sure consumers’ voices are heard loud and clear. We’re the ones with the most at stake.” In 2018 TURN was your voice in over 1500 print, radio, web and TV news stories.
YOUR RIGHT TO FAIR, AFFORDABLE RATES

TURN roots out wasteful spending, whether it is labeled as safety, reliability or customer service. That means holding companies accountable for past safety spending before allowing them to add more to your bills. TURN continues to be your voice in a wide variety of CPUC and legislative matters with the goal of protecting both your pocketbook and the planet. In the past year, we were able to beat back several anti-consumer utility schemes, and set the stage for new initiatives in 2019.

TURN Stops Unnecessary Sempra Gas Pipeline. Again.

TURN has been fighting since 2014 to stop Sempra (parent company of SoCal Gas and SDG&E) from expanding gas pipelines that customers don’t need. The pipelines wouldn’t do much to benefit customers, but could be quite beneficial to Sempra’s affiliates who want to get more gas into Sempra’s planned liquid natural gas export facility located on the coast of Baja, Mexico.

TURN succeeded in stopping the “North-South” pipeline in 2017. In another victory in June, the CPUC agreed with TURN and other customer and environmental representatives that Sempra’s proposal to spend over $600 million of customers’ money on yet another unnecessary pipeline should be rejected.

“Sempra tried to present this as a way to ensure emergency capacity,” said Staff Attorney Marcel Hawiger. “But the truth was that there were much less expensive and more sensible ways to address emergency needs,” said Hawiger. Once again TURN and our consumer allies agree that the pipeline Sempra wanted was not needed and hence could not be billed to customers.

PG&E’S RATE CASE CUT DOWN TO SIZE

It took seven TURN attorneys and numerous analysts and consultants to respond to PG&E’s General Rate Case, a massive set of complex documents and demands rife with consumer rip-offs that set rates in effect this year. In addition to beating back millions of dollars in unfair rate hikes, TURN’s GRC team, headed by Staff Attorney Hayley Goodson, successfully advocated for enhanced accountability standards designed to prevent PG&E from passing on the costs of its own mistakes to customers and from deferring needed safety improvements. TURN also succeeded in keeping customer service offices open and reducing inflated executive pay packages.

TURN General Counsel Bob Finkelstein said, “PG&E’s original demand was loaded with unnecessary and unjustified spending that TURN simply couldn’t let go unchallenged.” Rather than the audacious $457 million increase originally demanded by PG&E, the Commission ended up authorizing a mere $88 million increase. That means PG&E’s customers will avoid $369 million in unfair rate hikes annually for the next three years.

TURN submitted testimony showing that even moderate income PG&E customers often have insufficient incomes to meet the cost of living in their area, let alone afford utility rate increases. In order for the CPUC to analyze the affordability of PG&E’s future rate case requests, PG&E agreed to supply county cost of living data, so that customer impacts can be looked at through that all-important lens.

Bringing Better Energy to the San Joaquin Valley

Many communities in the San Joaquin Valley lack natural gas service and hence are reliant on very expensive fuels like propane. This leaves residents at the mercy of private, unregulated companies with no protections against unreliable service or inflated pricing. Better access to utility service for daily heating, cooking and hot water needs is desperately needed. The CPUC considered numerous proposals and mostly chose the options approved by TURN.

TURN’s team of Staff Attorney Elise Torres and Energy Analyst Eric Borden analyzed and evaluated over 15 pilot project proposals and also proposed a low-cost but effective pilot program focused on hot water heating. The CPUC agreed with many of TURN’s concerns with the various proposals and rejected all but one gas line extension project per TURN’s recommendations. TURN successfully opposed other proposals that would have shifted significant long-term costs to customers. The CPUC adopted TURN’s pilot proposal and also agreed to cost caps on the program.

TURN also won important changes to programs that promote the use of solar and other forms of “distributed generation,” so that more Californians can access green energy programs without shifting significant costs to other customers. Residential customers in disadvantaged communities will receive new incentives for single family homes and renters will receive subsidies to participate in clean, green energy programs.
The combination of California’s high cost of living and high utility costs can be toxic, especially for vulnerable customers who can’t afford the basics. Thanks to TURN-sponsored legislation, the utilities must do more to reduce dangerous and deadly shutoffs.

Staff Attorney David Cheng represented consumers at the CPUC when it determined what new consumer protections should be required. He said, “One of the most important changes we won is that utilities are required to have a goal of limiting disconnections to 2017 levels.” Additional new rules will forbid utilities from disconnecting customers during times when shutoffs are most dangerous — extremely hot or cold days, and P&GE, Edison, SDG&E and SoCalGas are also prevented from shutting off seniors or medically vulnerable customers unless they have been offered payment plans of four or more months. Chen said TURN will continue to push for solutions that reduce the number of disconnections even further.

TURN’S OUTREACH PROGRAMS WIDEN OUR IMPACT

TURN’s efforts to protect consumer rights secured significant wins for California ratepayers in 2018. TURN’s Organizing Director Ana Montes and Director of Strategic Initiatives Gabriela Sandoval worked with utility company staff to launch the SHARE (Subsidized Housing Assistance Relief for Energy) program in February. For many homeless Californians, the final barrier to accessing subsidized housing is utility debt. Residents of subsidized housing can also be evicted if their utilities are shut off. TURN won a $5 million fund, paid for by shareholders, to address this troubling problem. Over 300 families have been able to access housing or keep their housing with grants from the SHARE program.

TURN worked with grassroots partners and public health departments in Fresno, Stockton, Merced, Watsonville, and Oakland to organize trainings for over 150 health care advocates, social service staff, representatives from community-based organizations and LI-HEAP providers on how their clients can avoid shutoffs and access Medical Baseline and other programs designed to help customers stay connected.

In May, TURN released a first-of-its-kind report, Living Without Power: Health Impacts of Utility Shutoffs in California, and brought together public health professionals and advocates from across the state at our End Shutoffs for Healthy Communities convening.

Ultimately, Governor Brown signed SB 1138 (Hueso), The Medical Baseline Reform Act, into law. TURN authored and advocated for this bill that expands access to medical protections for Californians and engages county health departments to increase awareness of the Medical Baseline program.

TURN members continued to contact Consumer Advisor Ana Montes for advice and information. Almost 800 consumers received assistance and tips on how to prevent a shutoff or apply for programs that could help reduce the costs of their electric or gas bills.

We wish to express our special thanks to members who filed CPUC complaints or shared their stories with us and spoke out against the PG&E gas rate hike in Sacramento, Bakersfield, Chico and the Bay Area, and to those who joined us in our fight to make sure that consumers can receive high quality, reliable phone service no matter where they live.

We are extremely proud of our grassroots partners who joined us in speaking out at CPUC Disconnections workshops in Riverside, Fresno and Stockton. Many of our End Shutoffs partners were invited by the CPUC to serve as experts on the panels.

EQUITY FOR LOWER INCOME CUSTOMERS

Wildfires, and high utility costs, are especially devastating to low income communities with fewer resources. For medically vulnerable customers, seniors and many others, a small increase in monthly expenses can push them toward dangerous and deadly utility shutoffs.

With PG&E, Edison and SDG&E insisting they need much higher rates to run their system safely, these customers are literally in danger of being priced out. TURN is determined to stop that from happening with a multi-faceted approach including legislative reform, new regulations and on-the-ground community organizing.
Playing a Key Role

TURN’s administrative team of CFO Richard Perez, Legal Assistant Stephen Green and Administrative Assistant Anthony Hoey do an enormous amount to keep our office running smoothly and efficiently, respond to member questions and concerns and support our staff in myriad ways. In addition they were responsible for 290 CPUC filings on behalf of consumers in 2018.

TURN FINANCIAL CHARTS 2018

You see the results of our dedication — and your support — every month in your energy and phone bills.

- Twice a year, climate credits won by TURN lower your bill
- TURN wins refunds when utility companies don’t play by the rules
- TURN has defended consumers’ right to safe, dependable phone service which phone companies want to abandon
- Low income assistance protected and expanded
- TURN’s work has already saved Californians more than $10 billion!

The best way to support our work is to become a Speak Out Champion with a monthly contribution that ensures your voice is consistently heard by policymakers.

Use the attached envelope or sign up online at turn.org or http://bit.ly/Give2TURN
THANK YOU

FROM ALL OF US AT TURN

DONATIONS RECEIVED IN 2018

TURN regrets that we don’t have the space to thank all our donors individually, because we are so grateful for all of your support. Each and every donation we receive helps fund our consumer advocacy and assistance, and comes back to you in millions in savings!

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Speak Up Champions are members who make a monthly commitment to stand up for every California resident who pays an electric, gas or phone bill. Their outstanding support means that the consumer voice is heard at the CPUC, the State Capitol and wherever decisions are made concerning safe and reliable service at fair rates, consumer protections and corporate accountability.
Above: Senator Ben Hueso was presented the TURN Public Health Champion Award by Board Member Rosie Sanchez-Ulloa, Executive Director Mark Toney, and Director of Special Initiatives Gabriela Sandoval.

Right: Assemblymember Eloise Reyes was presented the TURN Truth to Power Award by Board Chair Carl Wood and Executive Director Mark Toney.

Left: Assemblymember Kevin McCarty was presented the TURN Profiles in Courage Award by Board Member Constance Slider-Pierre.